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Representing Africa Differently:

An Analysis of the Proposed Sale of the Africa Collection at the Wereld Museum Rotterdam

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Abstract

The proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum has been subject of recent debate in the Netherlands and in Africa. The Wereld Museum plans to sell the collection to private collectors and merely focus on Asia in the future. The main reason given for the sale is that the Dutch government is cutting the arts and culture budget heavily, and this makes the future of the museum uncertain. African museums and art institutions are opposed to the proposed sale because the history of the collection is contested and the objects of the collection belong to African cultural heritage. My goal in this mini-dissertation is to analyse how the proposed sale of this collection relates to the recent shifts in the representation of Africa in the ethnological museum. Theoretical concepts such as the idea of Africa, colonial ethnography discourse, the representation of 'Otherness' and the concept of multiculturalism have heavily influenced knowledge production around the Africa collections. I analyse how these concepts have influenced the meaning of the Africa collections in the Netherlands. It is against this background, that I seek to analyse what the proposed sale means in terms of heritage discourse and heritage as a cultural process. A discursive analysis of heritage in the Dutch context will give insight into the complexity of the proposed sale. Chapter One sets out the background to the study, the underlying theoretical concepts, as well as methodological foundations and issues. Chapter Two explores the politics of the representation of Africa in the museum. This chapter outlines the brief history of collecting and exhibiting African art, and provides a better understanding of the representation of Africa at the ethnological museum. Chapter Three discusses the changing role of the ethnology museum in a changing society. Furthermore, it looks into the complicated relationship between heritage and ethnology. Finally, in Chapter Four, I analyse the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld museum through a heritage lens. In this chapter, I set out what the sale means for heritage discourse in the Netherlands and what the meaning of the sale is for heritage as cultural process.

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List of Abbreviations

LAMO	Leidraad voor Afstoting van Museale Objecten
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
SVCN	Stichting Volkenkundige Collectie Nederland

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Introduction

The Africa collection of the Wereld Museum Rotterdam has been a subject of recent discussion, since the museum announced that it intends to sell the collection to private collectors. The Wereld Museum has some 9494 African objects of which 613 come from Angola, 65 from Cameroon, 197 from Ghana, 1560 from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 361 from Mali, 339 from Nigeria and 201 from Benin.[1]

The museum desires to be less dependent on government funding and wants to focus primarily on Asia in the future. The Netherlands is drastically cutting state subsidies for the arts and culture, and thus museums have to find part of their income from new sources or partners. At the moment the municipality of Rotterdam is looking into the sale and its legality. In addition, the Dutch parliament asked the government to look into the legality and consequences of the proposed sale. Other Dutch ethnological museums are concerned about the sale because they feel the collection needs to be preserved for the Netherlands. The International Council of African museums find it shocking that part of their cultural heritage is being sold and that they were not approached first.

My goal in this mini-dissertation is to analyse how the proposed sale of this collection relates to the recent shifts in the representation of Africa in the ethnological museum. In so doing, I hope to identify what effect this has on the notion of heritage, tangible and intangible, in a multicultural society such as the Netherlands. In this mini-dissertation, I will discuss the tangible and intangible nature of Africa collections in the Netherlands. The history surrounding African art in the Netherlands forms part of the intangible heritage of the ethnological museums and their collections.

Alongside this, I will analyse how Africa has been represented in the collections and exhibitions of the Wereld Museum, Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, and the Museum of Volkenkunde in Leiden. There are five museums in the Netherlands that have Africa collections. However, these three specific museums provide for an interesting perspective on how the Netherlands has dealt with the representation of Africa in the

[1] These are approximate numbers based on collection database of the museum. All the objects and their origins can be found online. Available at: http://www.wereldmuseum.nl/nl/decollectie/zoeken.html.

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museum space. In this dissertation, I will set out how the history of collecting and exhibiting African art relates to the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam.

First, I will elaborate on the key background information for this study. This is particularly necessary, since the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum is closely related to a set of other issues that need careful explanation. Chapter One, *The Background to the Study*, explains how the sale of the Africa collection relates to the history of collecting and exhibiting Africa collections, the representation of Africa within the museum and the role of colonial ethnography and heritage. The chapter also discusses the theoretical concepts that form the foundation of this dissertation. In particular, concepts such as discourse, the idea of Africa and the representation of 'Otherness' will be addressed herein. Furthermore, this first chapter discusses the methodology I chose to adhere to for this dissertation.

Chapter Two, *The Politics of Representation: Africa Collections and Exhibitions at the Tropenmuseum and the Wereld Museum*, discusses the politics of the representation of Africa within the ethnology museum in the Netherlands. This chapter briefly describes the history of collecting and exhibiting Africa collections at ethnological museums, aiming to explore how the politics of representation have changed over the years. It specifically looks at the Africa collections of the Wereld Museum and the Tropenmuseum. To offer an understanding of how ethnology museums work with the notion of representation in practice, I will also discuss the politics of representation at one specific exhibition, 'Family Stories from South Africa.'

The third chapter, *Africa Collections at Ethnological Museums: Ethnology or Heritage?* draws on the matters discussed in the second chapter to examine how the representation of Africa in the ethnological museum is intertwined with the construction of African heritage in the Netherlands. Chapter 3 explores the meaning of heritage while describing how heritage is related to ethnology. Moreover, this chapter not only explains why the discourse of heritage is used to analyse the meaning of the Africa collections but also why the heritage discourse is used to understand the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum.

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Chapter Four, *An Analysis of the Proposed Sale of the Africa Collection at the Wereld Museum Rotterdam,* analyses the proposed sale through a heritage lens. This chapter problematises the proposed sale by analysing it through heritage discourse. The complexity of the proposed sale is further analysed in this chapter. In particular, the proposed sale and its meaning will be analysed through the view of heritage as a cultural process. This distinction is relevant because dominant heritage discourse can be limiting, as it does not always take into account the intangible nature of heritage.

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Chapter 1

Background to the Study

Colonial power produces the colonized as a
fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and
yet entirely knowable and visible.
Homi K. Bhabha (1983: 199)

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will first discuss the background to this study, focusing on the Africa collections at three ethnology museums in the Netherlands and the proposed sale of one of these collections. Subsequently, I will address some of the theoretical concepts that this dissertation is based on, including terms such as Africa, discourse, colonial ethnology, multiculturalism and culture. Finally, I will discuss the methodology used, hoping to analyse what the possible sale of the Africa collection of the Wereld Museum means in terms of the construction of cultural heritage in a multicultural society.

1.2. Background to the Study

In this dissertation, I address several issues that are closely related to one another. Mapping these issues gives a better understanding of the correlation between the several topics. As I explain above, I seek to explore the meaning of the proposed sale of the Africa collection of the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam, and how it relates to the construction of heritage, tangible and intangible, for a multicultural society such as the Netherlands. I will elaborate further on the tangible and intangible nature of the collection later on in this chapter. The proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum, was, for a short time, a subject of debate in the Netherlands. Several Dutch newspapers and radio stations discussed what this proposed sale would mean for the Wereld Museum but also for other museums. Ethnology museums in the Netherlands were concerned that the collection would disappear into the hands of private collectors. At the same time, several museums and institutions in Africa raised their concerns about the proposed sale. Some of these concerns were posted as emails on the forum AFRICOM.

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AFRICOM is an international NGO that has a partnership with The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), together they aim to reinforce the professional museum network in Africa. The African museums are concerned that part of Africa's cultural heritage will disappear.[2] Radio Netherlands Worldwide also interviewed representatives of these museums and asked them for their opinion. However, aside from the comments in the AFRICOM forum and the radio interview, the voices of the staff of museums in Africa were hardly heard. All the while, the ethnological museums in the Netherlands described the Africa collection being part of 'our Dutch cultural heritage'.

This intrigued me because, in my view, the collection also had an alternative meaning aside from being part of Dutch cultural heritage. Yet, this meaning did not come to light in the debates around the collection in the Netherlands. Because the proposed sale of the collection is not a single event nor something that can be seen as separate from the shifts ethnological museums have dealt with in the past, this dissertation explores what the proposed sale means in a broader framework. The meaning of such a sale can only be understood against the historical background of collecting and exhibiting Africa collections in the Netherlands. Delving into this history is necessary to interpret how Africa is represented within the ethnology museum, what these representations and ideas about Africa might mean and the role of the ethnology museum at present.

The history of the ethnological museum is grounded in practices and disciplines such as colonial ethnology and anthropology. These have, to a great extent, informed the knowledge production around the collections. Also, these disciplines have influenced how African art objects were represented in the museum. The methods the ethnology museum used to represent different cultures changed as the museum had to reinvent itself. The ethnology museum found it had to adapt to an increasingly globalising society and started to see its collection more and more as heritage instead of mere

[2] AFRICOM is an international Council of African museums. The council has an online network. Available at: http://www.africom.museum/index.html. The AFRICOM-L forum online is used by African museums to express their views with regard to the sale. Available at: http://list.africom.museum/pipermail/africom-l_list.africom.museum/2011-September/002566.html.

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ethnological objects. In particular, it was argued that the ethnology museum should have a different role that would be more agreeable to a changing audience, particularly since the Netherlands has become more multicultural over the years and museums were being forced to change the way 'other' cultures are represented. This impelled ethnology museums to start thinking about the concept of heritage. The museums started to value their collections in terms of heritage but also became more aware of their historical responsibility towards society. This historical responsibility refers to the intangible heritage of the collection, namely periods of slavery and colonisation.

Therefore, before the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum can be analysed, the background to this sale should be first be discussed. This background partly lies in the histories of the Tropenmuseum and the Museum Volkenkunde because these museums have dealt differently with collecting and exhibiting on Africa. In relation to this, the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum is not a collection that can be analysed by itself, as it has been heavily influenced by certain ideas and concepts about Africa which are part of a bigger set of dominant paradigms that can be observed at other museums. Furthermore, the meaning of the proposed sale can only be understood in light of the recent shifts that the ethnology museums have experienced.

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1.3. Theoretical Concepts

1.3.1. *Ideas about Africa*

Before discussing how discourses function, what discourse means, and how these relates to the concept of Africa, it is necessary to analyse what is meant by the idea of 'Africa'. The term 'Africa' is used somewhat loosely in various contexts. In this section, I will analyse the ways in which the ethnological museum has formed knowledge around Africa collections in the Netherlands. I will also explore the representation of Africa within the museums, and address certain understandings and meanings of the term 'Africa'.

As Zeleza (2008) has argued, the idea of 'Africa' is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings. This entails that claims about 'African' culture, identity

and nationality or statements about what makes 'Africa' 'African' are often quite problematic, as these notions tend to swing between the poles of essentialism and contingency (Zeleza, 2008: 14). The whole collection is called the "Africa Collection" solely because the objects come from the same continent. The Museum of Volkenkunde in Leiden mentions that Africa, and objects that come from Africa, are so different that no generalisations can be made except that the objects all come from countries with a warm climate.[3] This is, however, a generalisation in itself and perhaps not the most accurate statement to make in relation to the Africa collection. Thus, analysing 'African' art and its role within a multicultural society such as the Netherlands is not that simple.

The idea of 'Africa' is constructed and its construction is often heavily dependent on its context. The ideas surrounding 'African' art in the Netherlands may vary significantly from perceptions on 'African' art in Africa or in other parts of the world. With regard to the idea of 'Africa, Zeleza (2008) points out:

> Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries – geographical, historical, cultural, and representational – have shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power, and African nationalism, including Pan-Africanism.
>
> (Zeleza 2008: 14)

These four concepts have also influenced the knowledge formation around African art collections and the making of exhibitions in the Netherlands. Within all these concepts there have been shifts, and at the same time ethnological museums have constantly altered their perceptions and ideas about 'Africa'. Therefore, when referring to or using terms like 'African Art' and 'African Culture' within the ethnology museum in the Netherlands, one should keep in mind the constructed nature of this term as well as who uses the term and for which purpose.

1.3.2. *The Discourse of Colonial Ethnography*

This dissertation analyses and discusses the functioning and influence of discourses of colonial ethnology and heritage. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by

[3]Stated in the description of the collection, available at: http://www.rmv.nl/.

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discourse in this regard. In particular, I hope to point out the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power.

By 'discourse', Foucault (1972) means:

> A group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment … Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But … since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct -all practices have a discursive aspect.
>
> (Hall 1992: 291)

According to Foucault (1972), discourse constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. Discourse, in a way, determines how to talk and write about the topic. It also rules out particular ways that do not fit within the 'set of discursive rules'.

One of Foucault's main points is that 'nothing has any meaning outside of discourse' (Foucault, 1972). The concept of discourse describes where meaning comes from. Meanings derive from objects of knowledge that exist within a given discourse and discourse itself produces and dominates knowledge formation. However, discourse, representation, knowledge and truth only have meaning within a specific historical context. The same phenomena are not true across different historical periods and there does not necessarily have to be continuity between them. As Foucault (1972) also explains, discourses- and more specifically knowledge and truth- are built through a grid of invisible power structures. Foucault (1972) argues that these power structures are exercised by 'means of discourse' rather than simply by force.

Mudimbe's work has mapped out the discursive process for Africa (Zeleza, 2008: 16). In his book, *The Invention of Africa*, he explores how Africa has been constructed through ethnocentric categories and conceptual systems, from anthropology and missionary discourses to philosophy (Mudimbe, 1988). Mudimbe (1988) explores the order of knowledge constituted in the socio-historical context of colonialism, which produced dichotomies between Europe and Africa.

The discourse of colonial ethnography has had a profound influence on the representation of Africa within the ethnology museum. This, again, has to do with the

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relationship between power and knowledge. The unequal power relationship was determined on the idea and difference between the west and the 'Others'. The process of deciding what constitutes African art is founded upon certain categories that exist within a constructed grid, one which holds the power to classify what is art and what is not. Also, this grid determines how the collection is viewed as a whole. This grid influences the meaning of the collections, and informs the meaning of these objects of knowledge. Mudimbe (1988) defines this process as 'epistemological ethnocentrism', which entails 'the belief that scientifically there is nothing to be learned from 'them' unless it is already 'ours; or comes from 'us'. Them', refers to the 'Other', and in this case relates to 'Africa' and 'Africans'. These distinctions are important because they have influenced the production of knowledge around the collections in the museum. Africa collections were first seen as interesting and intriguing because of their ethnological nature not because of their aesthetics. The interest for their aesthetics intensified later, particular as reference points for modern art. The relationship between the aesthetics of African art and its ethnological nature is a complicated one. Within colonial ethnography there was often a sense of exoticism ascribed to African art works.

In his work, Mudimbe (1988) distinguishes two kinds of 'ethnocentrism': 'an epistemological filiation' and an 'ideological connection'. These two kinds are often complementary and inseparable. Mudimbe (1988) states about both kinds that:

> The first is a link to the *episteme,* that is, an intellectual atmosphere which gives to anthropology its status as discourse, its significance as a discipline, and its credibility as a science in the field of human experience. The second is an intellectual and behavioral attitude which varies among individuals. Basically this attitude is both a consequence and an expression of a complex connection between the scholar's projection of consciousness, the scientific models of his time, and the cultural and social norms of his society.
>
> (Mudimbe 1988: 19)

Both types of 'ethnocentrism' form the basis of the discussion around African art in Dutch ethnological museums. Mudimbe's work on this matter is relevant because he focuses on Africa, and how Africa has been constructed through ethnographic categories. Seen under this lens, colonial ethnography has informed certain ideas around Africa, and these ideas influenced knowledge production in the ethnological museum in turn. African art and objects in ethnological museums have been

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categorised and understood according to these notions, influencing how Africa *and* the Africa collections were seen and understood. Although people were curious about the collection there was also a sense of disdain with regard to the collection.

In the early days of colonial ethnography, condescension became the tone that predominated in European discourse surrounding Africa (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 34). Africa, according to Hegel (1956) does not form a part of the historical world, it shows neither movement nor development. The discourse of colonial ethnography and its development are strongly influenced by the dominant discourse of history. As I have discussed earlier, discourses work with a set of rules that determine what is part of that discourse and what is not. An example of this can be found in how the dominant discourse of history works with primary and secondary sources. For instance, written documents will be seen as a primary source whilst oral history is often not seen as a primary source.

The dominant discourse of history highly influenced colonial ethnography. The arrival of the Europeans in Africa is often perceived as the starting point of African history. According to Chakrabarty (1992), narratives are subordinated to the rules of evidence and to the 'secular, linear calendar' that the writing of history must follow. This writing of history always happens in phases of improvement and human progress. At the end of the time line one can find ultimate civilization, democracy and other perceived signs of 'progress'. One of the reasons that African history is seen as a variation of the master narrative is because African history supposedly started later on the linear scale. This demonstrates that history is complicit in sustaining forms of power that have also influenced ideas around colonial ethnography. Both disciplinary discourses have a violent epistemic core that needs to be understood before the Africa collections and their meaning in terms of ethnology and heritage can be analysed.

There are a couple of key features of colonial ethnology that elucidate this violent epistemic core. First, the manner in which colonial ethnography produces certain imaginaries. Colonial ethnography produced certain images around Africa that are still visible in the mainstream western imaginary of Africa today. The image of Africa was one of a vast wilderness with tropical rainforests, lush vegetations and an impenetrable jungle (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 34). This explorer imaginary, which

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is not representative of Africa's landscape in any way, suggests that all this land was vacant and therefore rightfully available to colonise. Colonial ethnography is known to produce images and figures without a name or hardly any reference. Through this process the images and figures are objectified and isolated from their environment. In this view, objects were 'rightfully' taken from Africa and represented in colonial spaces in Europe.

Second, the ethnology of the first half of the nineteenth century was largely racial in conception. The objective during this time was to map races and knowledge, or the illusion of knowledge, which was not detailed enough to distinguish peoples (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 93). Colonial ethnography at the latter part of the nineteenth century went beyond this stage in some respects. The grid that underlies the discourse of colonial ethnography had different knowledge requirements and illusions, as it existed according to a different regime of truth. Producing images and knowledge about the colonised is one of the fundamental forms of control and possession. One of the effects of such knowledge is that subject peoples are turned into visual objects (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 934). These visual objects were often informed by binaries such as masculinity and femininity. African women were often portrayed as seductive and sensuous and men were depicted as threatening and primitive.

The third feature relates to how colonial ethnology evolved as a discipline. It did not take long before the first ethnology museums emerged in the Netherlands. The ethnology museum became the home for research disciplines such as archaeology, biology, and geology amongst others. Analysing collections and exhibitions of African art at the ethnological museums in the Netherlands reveals how the museums have dealt with representing Africa in different ways. By the end of the 19th century, ethnographic museums in the Netherlands, especially those in Leiden and Rotterdam, had built up Africa collections. As Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2005) points out, there was a close relationship between ethnology as knowledge formation, collections and museums, whether of natural history or ethnology. Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2005) further argues that colonial ethnology discourse first became institutionalised through the museum and later, the university.

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The history of ethnological and anthropological museums is closely intertwined with the dominant discourses of the Enlightenment, imperialism and colonialism (Vos, 2004:8). Therefore, as Vos (2004) argues most museums adopted the approach of looking outward from the European epicenter. It is important to keep in mind that the history of African art in the Netherlands is created from this epicenter, dominating narratives around the Africa collections. The coloniality of disciplines such as anthropology and ethnology are key to understanding the very nature of these collections. It should be noted that ethnology is not always recognised as a separate discursive discipline, this heavily depends on the context. Anthropology emerged as a distinctive discipline at the beginning of the colonial era. In addition, the object of these studies was always the non- Western people dominated by Western powers (Asad, 1973: 15).

There have been various shifts within the discipline of anthropology, and there have been changes in the objects of study. Asad (1973) argues, that these shifts led to a 'disintegration of the discipline' and with this, social anthropology, like colonial ethnography, became more organised and institutionalised. Although the anthropological and ethnological nature of these museums and the debates around these disciplines are important, this dissertation will not extensively focus on the history of anthropology and ethnology as disciplines. Instead, I will focus on how they have produced knowledge around the Africa collections and how both discourses have influenced the formation of heritage discourse.

Colonial ethnography, like anthropology, had an influence that extended beyond the museum space. As Clifford (1986) explains in his work, ethnography poses questions at the boundaries of civilisations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. In a way, every exhibition in the museum relates to these issues. These questions are of interest, especially because they reveal the complex relationship between knowledge and power, which form the core of these disciplines. The ethnology museum has experienced quite a transformation over the years. Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious when making generalising statements with regard to the developments at the ethnology museum. It cannot be said that the ethnology museum today is the same as it was in its beginning. However, traces of the colonial trajectory that formed the museum and the representation of other cultures can still be identified and discussed.

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These traces are also the reason why ethnology museums in the Netherlands started to question their own role in society.

1.3.3. *Representation of 'Otherness'*

Ideas about the 'Other' and 'Otherness' have strongly influenced the discourse of colonial ethnology and anthropology. Ethnological museums in the Netherlands often used anthropological models to represent the 'Other'. The politics of representation are intertwined with the way colonial ethnology and dominant discourses of anthropology work in the ethnological museum. In this section, I will explain the theoretical concept of 'Otherness' before I discuss how the representation of 'Otherness' has influenced the ethnological museum in the past and affected its present role.

The complex process of 'Othering' can be understood as both an epistemological and a political issue (Hallam & Street, 2000: 1). Scholars such as Bhabha, Clifford, Said and Hall have contributed to debates around the representation of 'Otherness' in their work. The work of Said, in particular, relates to ideas about the 'Other' and 'Otherness' in this context. Said's discussion of the Orient as concept is useful to understand the functioning of representation in the ethnological museum. The 'Orient' is an imaginary of sorts, full of romance and exotic beings that are invented by Europeans. '*Orientalism'* is described as a way to come to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. Orientalism itself also functions as a "discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imaginary and even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (Said, 1978: 2). Said examines 'Orientalism' as discourse because it provides for a better understanding of the 'systematic discipline' by which European culture managed and produced the 'Orient' (Said, 1978: 3).

In a similar way, the concept of Orientalism is relevant to ideas around Africa. As Zeleza (2008) points out, the idea of Africa is as much a social construct as a reality. Within the field of colonial ethnography Africa often functioned as an imaginary. This went hand in hand with the process of 'Othering'. Through this process, ideas about Africa and Africans were constructed. This process is similar to the Orientalist discourse that Said describes in his work. In the museum space, Africa functioned as a

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constructed and imagined place that the ethnology museum tried to represent within the museum space. In the beginning the ethnological museum mainly portrayed t material culture, the way people lived and worked, as well as their way of government. This relates to Said's (1987) argument about 'the systematic discipline of European culture'. Africa, like the 'Orient' has been produced and represented in a social, political and imaginative way. Nederveen Pieterse (1992) argues that the way in which Africa and Africans were depicted during this time relate to the wider politics of intercultural representation.

The representation of 'Otherness' is part of the general question of representation and stereotyping (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 225). These general questions are related to human recognition and communication (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 225). In order to identify and recognise 'Othering' the process of 'Othering' should be deconstructed. As Pieterse (1992) sets out in his work, 'Otherness' is often determined and analysed to a great extent, by boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for the individual or group. At the same time, hierarchy also determines difference. The representation of 'Otherness' has certain meanings and values, which makes the difference between self and other everything but neutral. Therefore, the constructed binary between self and other is heavily influenced by their unequal power relationship. The analysis of representation and 'Otherness' is itself historically and culturally determined (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 226). Nederveen Pieterse (1992) cautions that analyses of representation themselves carry or imply certain forms of representation. It is not uncommon for analyses of stereotypes to produce new stereotypes.

Next to understanding how 'Otherness' is determined, the historical context of 'Othering' should be addressed. It is important to keep in mind that 'Otherness' is a historical process. The concept of 'Otherness,' as used in this dissertation, is deployed by various discourses that are, in a Foucauldian interpretation, a-historical. Therefore, it is important to explore what the historical functioning of 'Otherness' within certain discourses means. Nederveen Pieterse (1992) argues that images of 'Otherness' are an indication of shifting social relations and patterns of hegemony. Changes in the representation of 'Otherness' according to time and place do occur. Yet, as Pieterse (1992) explains, these are changes in the circumstances of the labelling group. One of the main points Pieterse (1992) makes is that the so-called 'Other' has undergone

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many changes corresponding to his or her different position and to shifts in European culture and stages in European colonialism. Therefore, we cannot speak of one 'Other' because while the grid for constructing 'Otherness' remained the same, the context did change.

Pietserse (1992) argues that the other should be seen as plural. Many analyses of 'the other' end up generalising, objectifying and reifying 'Otherness' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 233). There are plenty of constructions of the 'Other' and their identities vary according time and location, as well as the status, gender, and relationships of the labelling groups (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 233). Therefore, generalising statements can be problematic because they could lose sight of the complex nature of 'Othering'. As Pieterse (1992) argues, homogenizing the process of 'Othering', introduces an essentialism of 'Otherness' that creates a 'static dualistic relationship between Self and Other'. The single most important feature of representations of 'Otherness' is the role they play in establishing and maintaining social inequality. This social inequality often produces certain stereotypes (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 234). Thus, the consequences of representation of 'Otherness' and production of knowledge about the 'Other' go far beyond the museum space and can reinforce stereotypes.

This is a dual process, because whilst the consequences and representation of 'Otherness' go beyond the museum space and are part of a wider debate on the politics of representation, the museum itself has reached out to the so-called 'Other.' This is the case in the Netherlands. Vos (2004) describes how after the Second World War and the heyday of colonialism, independence for many multi-ethnic nations meant that new national identities had to be fused together from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In post-colonial times, as the emphasis on evolution and development grew less important, there was a tendency to concentrate on authenticity, traditionalism and *the specific* when it came to representing art (Vos, 2004:18). An increased awareness of the universal aspects of cultural phenomena in the 1980s convinced some institutions that cultures should be represented in a more globalised context. Vos (2004) accurately describes how in the Netherlands, this lead to a discussion about who exactly should be in charge of representing cultures in a more globalised context, the modern art museums or the ethnological museums? The modern art museums left it up to the ethnological museums to display cultures in a

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different way. Although the context of exhibiting African art might have changed, the colonial space in which the art objects are displayed remains the same.

In '*Intruders, Reflections on Art and the Ethnological Museum'*, the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden discusses how it has dealt with its role as an ethnological museum in a changing society. This book was the result of a project the Museum started to investigate the meaning of its role as an ethnological museum. Vos (2004) states that in some ways the museum has assumed its natural role, namely that of conserving the old, yet no longer anticipating cultural or material change as it once did. The three main fundamental functions of the ethnological museum – conservation, research and display – must be kept in mind. Vos (2004) argues that the ethnological museums have often adopted the art museum's approach of displaying so-called masterpieces without regard for the proportional relationship between the objects and the cultures they are supposed to represent. Ensuring a proportional relationship means that there is a clear balance between objects and cultures. One masterpiece of a certain culture cannot represent that culture nor is it representative for that specific culture.

The relationship between the objects and the cultures are of importance in terms of representation. Representing the objects and cultures in a 'just' way would give the museum an opportunity to discuss ways of coping with our common history (Vos, 2004:22). As societies become increasingly differentiated in their cultural experience, art museums have become more aware of anthropological approaches vis-à-vis art, in order to maintain some relevance to the communities that they serve (Vos, 2004:23). Because of the changing nature of these communities, one has to question the role of ethnological museums in a multicultural society such as the Netherlands. In order to do so, the concept of 'multiculturalism' needs a further explanation.

1.3.4. *Multiculturalism*

In '*Intruders, Reflections on Art and the Ethnological Museum,'* different scholars discuss how the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden should deal with its responsibility as museum. This work forms an interesting example of the dialogues that museums have to engage in, given their changing role in society. The Netherlands Museums Association committed itself to a democratic mandate for museums called the

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Intercultural Museum Programme. This programme sought to stimulate museums and related cultural institutions to play an active role in the cultural diversity of Dutch society (Drosterij, 2004: 114). Another important tool to promote cultural diversity was adopted recently. In 2011, the 'Code Culturele Diversiteit', a code to promote cultural diversity within museums came into existence. Due to the increase of non-Western migrants in the Netherlands cultural diversity became increasingly important for the cultural sector. [4] Research into the cultural diversity in the Netherlands showed that there was a so-called 'white monoculture' whilst 90% of cultural institutions finds cultural diversity important.[5] Thus, the Netherlands and its cultural institutions are increasingly aware of their role in society.

Scholars like Drosterij (2004) doubt the meaning of this project, questioning if the museum will ultimately become a negative of itself and if society itself will start looking like a museum? In order to discuss and explore this question, a few points on culture and multiculturalism are in order. Ethnological museums often use the term 'changing societies' to refer to the increasingly multicultural society. In addition, the museums often argue that they should adapt to this 'changing society'. It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to extensively explore the notions of culture and multiculturalism within the Netherlands. However, it is important to map the multiple notions of culture that are at play in the discussion about African art within the Dutch ethnological museum.

First, it should be stipulated that these art objects were part of cultures that existed long before the Europeans collected them. Second, through positioning the art objects within the ethnological museum, this culture was represented as *the 'Other'* culture, one which stood in contrast with western culture. Third, African museums and institutions now want these objects to come back to Africa because they are seen as part of *their* culture. Finally, the last notion of culture relates to the sentiment of Dutch ethnological museums that want to connect to a changing society that is perceived as multicultural.

[4] The Netherlands uses the terms 'allochtoon' (immigrant) and 'autochtoon' (indigenous) to differentiate between someone who comes from abroad and an original resident. Dutch is the only language that distinguishes between migrants from the West and non-Western migrants.
[5] Research project 'De olifant in de kamer: Staalkaart culturele diversiteit in de basisinfrastructuur' by the LAGroup conducted in 2008. This project researched cultural diversity within public cultural institutions in the Netherlands.

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The notion of a multicultural society has heavily influenced the modes of representation within the ethnological museum. 'Multiculturalism' is a term that has many contradictory implications. Similar to 'culture,' 'multiculturalism' is difficult to define. I have previously discussed the ways culture comes into play in this debate, but have not discussed definitions of culture. An exhaustive definition of culture is difficult to formulate. Multiculturalism, is itself referring to the existence of more than one culture, might seem easier to define but is completely dependent on the environment. For instance, multiculturalism has a different meaning in the United States than it has in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, the term is closely related to the country's colonial past.

The Netherlands held three colonies: Surinam, Indonesia and the Dutch Caribbean. Three waves of immigration can be recognised in the Netherlands. The first wave consisted of people from the former Dutch East Indies- now Indonesia- between 1945 and the early 1960s. The second wave was a labour migration wave that took place in the 1960s and early 1970s, so-called 'guest workers' were recruited in Southern Europe, Turkey and Morocco (Vasta, 2007: 715). At the same time there was a wave of immigration from Surinam and the Dutch Antilles. Since the 1980s there has also been an influx of refugees and asylum-seekers from Africa and former Yugoslavia (Vasta, 2007: 715).

Over the years the Netherlands has adopted various integration policies to respond to this influx of migrants. Three main approaches can be identified. Vasta (2007) sets out the models of inclusion that the Netherlands has adopted. The first model is 'pillarization', this model allowed different groups who maintained different religious beliefs to create and hold their own institutions (Vasra, 2007: 716). The effects of this model can still be seen today, for instance in schools, trade unions and public services.

After the first 'guestworkers' arrived in the Netherlands they were also 'allowed' to create institutions that preserved their culture and group identity (Vasra, 2007: 716). In the late 1970s, the Netherlands realised that the former 'guest workers' would not return back to their home countries. It therefore, adopted the *Ethnic Minorities Policy*

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in 1983. The policy was seen as a welfare policy for segregated social groups (Vasta, 2007: 716). It also adopted a few other socio-economic approaches to promote integration. However, in the domain of *culture, language and religion*, migrants had to develop their own cultural, religious and linguistic institutions (Vasta, 2007: 716). Because the goals of the *Ethnic Minorities Policy* were not achieved, the government adopted another approach. The integration-policy was based on the inclusion of migrants in Dutch society. This also led to new immigration laws and policies. Vasta (2007) argues that the integration-policy had an indirect emphasis on cultural integration. This has had a strong influence on debates around culture and culture within the ethnology museum. In addition, these developments have changed and altered the meaning of 'multiculturalism'.

1.3.5. *Heritage*

The museum's role can be analysed in a philosophical way or through the discourse of museology, which looks at how museums have both established and adapted their role as an educational mechanism under social and political pressures. In addition, the ethnology museum and its contemporary role can be understood through the heritage discourse. The heritage discourse is applicable to this debate,— because ethnological museums themselves have started to act through this discourse.

The so-called shift from ethnology to heritage came about due to changes within the traditional functions of the ethnology museum. Lum (2004) states that the discursive and operational linkage between 'the act of accumulating objects and the idea of preserving a past that is broken from the present' is no longer tenable. This reflects the shift that ethnology experienced as a discipline. Similarly, Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2004) explains that while ethnology as a discipline shifted from the museum to the university, museums became the 'custodians of the collections and displays of an outmoded ethnology'. That is, museums of ethnology became museums of ethnology's own "heritage". This point is of interest because it means that the *raison d'etre* for ethnology museums has changed.

The museum now has other functions, next to or instead of its traditional functions as an ethnology museum. In order to understand the shift from ethnology to heritage, and the use of the heritage discourse, the meaning and definition of heritage needs to be

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addressed. There is no single definition for the term heritage. As various scholars have pointed out, heritage is a complicated concept to unpack, it is related to the tangible and intangible but it also relates as much to the past as to the present.

There are certain rules and regulations which ethnological museums in the Netherlands need to adhere to. Ethnological museums now also fall under broader international frameworks that regulate cultural heritage. In particular, there is a heritage discourse in the Netherlands which ethnological museums have used to legitimise their right to existence and protect their collections. The heritage discourse is to a great extent governed by the policies of all ethnology museums, forming an intrinsic part of them as well. According to Smith (2006) this form of heritage is more governed and 'authorized'. Although heritage discourse is still evolving every day, this 'type' of heritage is restrictive in the sense that it cannot take into account all heritage related practices of individuals or communities. Heritage is related to remembering, commemorating or forgetting sites and events in society. The importance of commemorating cultural objects or rituals is difficult to regulate.

Because heritage, relates to the past and the history attached to this past, there is a tension between heritage, history and memory. Various scholars have described this tension. Baines (2007) argues that history and memory are in a fundamental state of tension. Public memory reflects the structure of power and how power is regulated in society. This type of power is always contested in a world of ideological differences, where cultural understanding is always grounded in the material structure of society itself (Baines: 2007:168).

The less governed 'type' of heritage is understood in different ways. As Shepherd (2008) argues this 'type' or 'form' of heritage relates to issues of culture, identity and citizenship. In this view, heritage can be seen as a cultural process that exists next to heritage discourse. Smith (2006) argues that the process of cultural heritage underlines the importance of intangible heritage. This is not only applicable to the post-colony but also to European states, who tend to use the language of heritage because they are dealing with increasingly globalised contexts and phenomena such as multicultural societies.

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Heritage discourse plays an important role because it determines, to a great extent, the meaning and value of the Africa collections. As discussed above, heritage discourse is closely related to issues of memory, culture, identity and citizenship. Therefore, it proves to be a useful lens to analyse the proposed sale of the Africa collection of the Wereld Museum.

1.4. *Methodology*

Various scholars have studied the representation of 'Otherness' through the analysis of representation in texts. In structuralist approaches, representation is seen as structured in terms of binary oppositions, such as male/female, young/old, light/darkness and civilization/nature (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 226). These binaries are easy to recognise in the early representation of Africa within the ethnological museum. However, this approach is all too narrow to go beyond the mere recognition of the process of 'Othering'. Nederveen Pieterse (1992) identifies a couple of problems with this approach. One of those problems is that this approach tends to be a-historical. This is problematic because the historical context of collecting and exhibiting African art is crucial to analysing the meaning of the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum.

Another problem, Pieterse (1992) argues, is that the character of representations, the shifts in imaginary and/or meaning over time, tends to be underplayed in structuralist approaches because every difference is resolved into a binary opposition. Finally, Pieterse (1992) argues that structuralism has an idealist bias given that it explains ideas and icons in terms of ideas and not social relations and interests. Yet, social relations and interests are crucial to understanding the representation of 'Otherness'.

Thus, structuralist discourse may produce a very homogenous view of 'western culture' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 227). This dissertation seeks to explore the meaning of the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum beyond the sheer recognition of the process of 'Othering'. It is against this background that I question what the proposed sale of the Africa collection means in terms of heritage. I analyse heritage as a discourse as well as a cultural process. Although the two 'forms' of heritages might influence each other, merely viewing heritage as a discourse could be limiting. Conversely, viewing heritage as a cultural process allows for a

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problematisation of heritage discourse whilst still taking into account the materiality of heritage. Therefore, in this process, I will explain what the sale means in terms of heritage discourse in the Netherlands and what the sale means for heritage as a cultural process.

A discursive analysis of heritage discourse takes into account the historical context of the Africa collections and exhibitions as well its meaning in terms of intangible and tangible heritage. The heritage discourse also leaves room for the analysis of intercultural representation as well as the performativity of culture within the museum. Because the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the museum is intertwined with the history of the collection, the representation of Africa in the museum and its meaning in terms of ethnology and heritage; an analysis of the heritage discourse seems key to understanding the proposed sale. Therefore, I will first discuss the history of collecting and exhibiting African art at ethnology museums. Second, I will discuss the politics of representation of Africa within the ethnology museum. Third, I will analyse the proposed sale against this background through an analysis of heritage discourse.

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1.5. *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have outlined the background for this study. The history of collecting and exhibiting Africa collections in the Netherlands needs to be explained in order to understand the politics of representation of Africa within the museum. The politics of representation are then closely related to the functioning of the discourse of colonial ethnography and later heritage. I have explained key theoretical concepts such as discourse, ideas around Africa, colonial ethnography, the representation of 'Otherness' and heritage, in order to describe the subject of debate which is at hand in this dissertation. Finally, I have discussed my methodology and some methodological concerns, hoping to explain how I will carry out a discursive analysis of heritage in the Dutch context. With this, I hope to examine how this discourse on heritage has largely determined the functioning of the ethnological museum today.

Chapter 2

The Politics of Representation: Africa Collections and Exhibitions at the Tropenmuseum and the Wereld Museum

Is a Museum of Ethnology only a tool to distribute
cultures and histories of 'others' or is it also a
catalyst for releasing cultural and historical
consciousness in terms of 'our' behavior as dominant power?
Ken Lum. (2004: 40)

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe how the Africa collections came into existence at the Tropenmuseum and at the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam. Seeing that the history behind the collections and the individual art objects is rather rich and extensive, I will only focus on issues that are of interest in light of this mini-dissertation. First, I will provide a brief history on collecting and exhibiting African art at ethnology museums in the Netherlands. Secondly, I will discuss the representation of Africa at the ethnology museum. The notion of 'representing Africa' is rather broad. Yet, there are a few key features that can be identified to illustrate how Africa has been represented.

All the museums have a permanent Africa collection but have also organised temporary exhibitions, sometimes with art objects of the permanent collections and sometimes only focused on African art. I have chosen to discuss one exhibition in particular because it best illustrates how the politics of representation of Africa work within the ethnological museum. This exhibition is the *'Familieverhalen uit Zuid-Afrika'*, translated as family stories from South Africa, held at the Tropenmuseum in 2002. Analysing the history, the policies and decisions surrounding the production of this exhibition allows for a more in-dept understanding of the complex representation of Africa in the museum and its implications for African heritage in the Netherlands.

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2.2. The Art of Collecting

Ethnographic exhibitions fall into the wider context of collecting, measuring, classifying, picturing, filling, and displaying narrating colonial others during the heyday of colonialism (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 57). Before outlining the history of the Africa collections at the three museums it is pertinent to understand the very nature of 'collecting'. The phenomenon of collecting has been a very important part of anthropological discourse over the last decades. The dominant discourse of anthropology has played a major role in defining the 'rules' for exhibiting African art. The task of the traditional anthropological museum is to provide information about distant peoples. These museums do this by exhibiting objects that, within the museum category, are described as material culture. Museums often created exhibitions on the basis of functionalist anthropology, a school of thought that emerged in the early twentieth century. In the museum space this often meant exhibitions with a geographical or thematic focus that were largely ahistorical.

It has now become clear that collecting in other cultures cannot be seen as an activity that is aloof from global and local political developments (Ter Keurs, 2007: 3). Today it is generally accepted that ethnological collections are not representative of the cultures in which they have been collected. These collections 'say' more about the contact that these cultures had with European collectors, than about the cultures in which these objects were made or used (Ter Keurs, 2007: 3). This is perceived as a major paradigm shift and it has been argued that this notably changes the way the collections of ethnological museums are interpreted (Ter Keurs, 2007: 3). This paradigm shift opens up other ways of seeing, providing a different understanding of the collections.

Ter Keurs (2007) argues that we can no longer look at collections without thinking about issues of competition, prestige, possession, jealously and curiosity. Politics can no longer be disregarded as an important influence in collecting activities. The shifts in the last years of collecting African art in the Netherlands demonstrates that, indeed, the collections are not representative of the cultures in which the objects were made or used. Similarly, Nederveen Pieterse (1995) argues that observations on ethnographic exhibitions during the heyday of colonialism can be recognised in

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present-day forms of ethnographic exhibitions. In order to understand this, or argue otherwise it is vital to briefly explain the history of collecting and exhibiting African art within ethnological museums in the Netherlands. Whilst the nature of ethnographic collections themselves does not change, their relationship with the museum and society is continuously changing. It is exactly this relationship that marks the shifts in representing Africa differently.

2.3. A Brief History of Collecting and Exhibiting African Art at Ethnologic Museums in the Netherlands

The foundation of African art collections in the Netherlands coincides with the trend of collecting art objects from colonies and trading partners in Europe at the time. Natural history museums from the 1700s onwards displayed specimens of flora and fauna, arts and crafts, mummies, skulls and other bits and pieces of human remains. (Aldrich, 2009: 137). The World's Fair in Antwerp in 1894 was one of the first exhibition were Africans were present. Other fairs include the Chicago World Fair in 1893. At the Fair in Antwerp, a Congolese village was reconstructed, for which sixteen Congolese were brought over to Europe. Three of them died during the Fair and four fell seriously ill (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 95). Exhibits of non-western peoples were accompanied with exotic animals, it was believed that this was an appropriate combination (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 95).

Thus, while in colonial ethnography non-western peoples were turned into objects of knowledge, at colonial exhibitions they were turned into spectacles (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 95). It is not surprising that multiple colonial museums opened their doors in Brussels, London, Amsterdam and Paris between the 1880s to the 1930s. These museums combined state initiatives with private efforts by colonial lobbies. Museum building went hand in hand with the manifestation and display of empire. In a symbolic way the museums brought empire to national capitals, and made imperial capitals out of national capitals. The museums became clear manifestations of colonial power. In these early stages of exhibiting non-western people at colonial museums, wild actions like war dances, cannibal dances and battle scenes were needed to accompany the exhibitions. Ostentatious buildings were constructed to display museums as symbols of status in major cities.

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The economy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was expanding steadily through the 19th century. An important source of this prosperity lay in the East, the Dutch East Indies as it was referred to at the time. The international trade network of the Dutch had centuries of history behind it and the African continent had always played a big role in this history (Faber, 2011: 13). The ships of the Dutch East India Company went around the southern tip of Africa. The lesser-known West India Company was concentrated on the triangle of trade between Africa, colonies in the Americas and the Netherlands. For a long time this was the most important European trading company in Africa (Faber, 2011: 13). Not surprisingly, Dutch traders played a significant role in the slave trade from fortified positions on the African coast, such as in, what are now called, Senegal and Ghana.

The Netherlands is described as the business quarters of the slave trade in its Golden Age (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 52). Most of the Dutch activity was concentrated in three regions: Ghana, South Africa and Congo. The trading activities of the Dutch are closely related to the African art collections today. Beumers and Abspoel (2000) state that the foundation of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam was laid around the time Dutch involvement with Africa took the form of trade contacts, expeditions, and efforts to convert the 'natives' to Christianity.

Dutch activity in Africa gradually increased from the 1860s onwards. This was around the same time that the colonial scramble for Africa erupted and became very intense. Although the Kingdom of the Netherlands was invited to the Conference of Berlin in 1884, the Kingdom only played a minor role at the conference as the Kingdom's gaze turned to the East not to the South (Faber, 2011: 15). During this time the world's first colonial museum – the Koloniaal Museum (Colonial Museum) – was founded in Haarlem. The museum opened in 1871 and focused primarily on providing information about the natural recourses, the cultivated crops, products and goods of the Dutch Tropics (Faber, 2011: 15). In accordance with the principles of the Koloniaal Museum, the ethnographic objects initially served to illustrate the manner in which the native population groups gave shape to their material culture (Faber, 2011: 15). This museum had a more technical ethnological approach that did not correspond with the approach taken by the more classical museums of ethnology such

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as the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and the Wereld Museum.[6] Because the primary concern of the museums were the Dutch colonies, Africa and African art were not given a place either in the Koloniaal Museum or in the new museums.

The ethnographic museums in the Netherlands, particularly in Leiden and Rotterdam, had built up Africa collections by the end of the 19th century. From this period onwards the museums showed some sort of interest in the continent. The museums were not sure how the African art objects should be viewed at the time; the classic dilemma between scientific approaches and artistic appreciation soon arose (Faber, 2011: 16). In 1902 the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam began collecting on its own, and over time the museum's collecting policy has become increasingly specialised. Specialisation by region also became a matter of policy. Purchases from art dealers were usually made with specific exhibitions in mind. One of the first exhibitions on Africa was organised by the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde based in Rotterdam. The exhibition was on Congolese art. African art was also present in missionary museums, these exhibitions often travelled through Catholic parishes.

There was also aesthetic appreciation of African art, mainly in Paris. Avant-garde artists such as Picasso, Derain and Matisse expressed an interest in African art as well. The appropriation of African art by artists such as Picasso, and the use of 'primitive' forms and shapes heavily influenced the way the Western public viewed African art within the ethnological museum. Although an extensive discussion on the impact of the appropriation of African art by European artists goes beyond the scope of this dissertation; it is important to keep in mind the image that was created around African art by European artists and how it informed the power relation between the African art objects in the museum and established artists that used so-called African forms and shapes.

The interest of the Netherlands still remained somewhat subdued because of its lack of colonies in Africa, but this changed in large part due to the art dealer Carel van Lier (1897-1945). In the 1920s, Van Lier began combining the works of Dutch

[6] The Museum Volkenkunde was founded in 1837 as the Ethnografisch Museum or Ethnographic Museum and the Wereld Museum was founded in 1884 as the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde or Museum for Geography and Ethnology.

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painters with ethnographic objects from Africa and Oceania (Faber, 2011: 17). This collection of African art steadily expanded and he exhibited his collection for the first time in Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 1927. Not long after this moment, various collectors and artists exhibited their collections. Not all the museums immediately decided to exhibit these collections. The Koloniaal Museum, for instance, collected African art objects that were kept in storage. The museum received donations of African art objects from various private individuals. Faber (2011) argues that without the presence of Dutch traders on the African coasts and hinterlands in the 19th century, the number of collected objects from this continent would never have become so large.

The New African Trading Association facilitated and stimulated the collection of African art objects. It is unfortunate that the agents who worked for the New African Trading Association did not record how and with what resources they obtained the objects. The history behind the purchase of the art objects is often still contested today. Some of the art objects were bought from existing collections or were donated from existing collections. For example, in 1886 E.A. Brunner, who lived in South Africa, lent and later donated his collection to the museum. This collection consisted mainly of Zulu weapons. The documentation that accompanied these earliest pieces is just as nondescript as the tales surrounding their collection are interesting (Beumer & Abspoel, 2000: 21). The history behind single art objects, apart from the history of the material culture of the objects, is often hard to trace. Accounts from missionaries and collectors often reveal different methods used for collecting objects. Sometimes the collectors knew that people would dispose of objects at a certain point. The Africa collections continued to grow rapidly, and soon the museums were confronted by the same question: what to do/ or should be done with the Africa collection?

After the Second World War, the Netherlands experienced a difficult period of decolonization. In November 1945, the Koloniaal Instituut (Colonial Institute) decided to change the association's name to the Indies Institute and change the Colonial Museum to the Indies Museum. The new names avoided the name colonial. Obviously the museum and the institute were very much focussed on the East Indies and the relationship between the Netherlands and the East Indies. This relationship more or less defined the scope of the museum and institute. It comes as no surprise

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that the museum felt that the African objects did not really belong in such a museum. The Africa collection was not only an 'ideological' obstacle, its physical presence also made any further expansion of the East Indies collection difficult (Faber, 2011: 26). The museum made an exchange, loan and purchase agreement with the Museum of Volkenkunde in Leiden so both museums could house part of the Africa collection. As a result of the sale in 1947, the Africa collection was reduced to a few hundred objects. In 1950s, the Indies Institute decided to reinvent itself, and change its name to the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Royal Tropical Institute). In delineating a new policy, tropical Africa and South America were seen as the most important areas of expansion.

The Royal Tropical Institute had a social-economical approach towards the African continent, and gave Africa a permanent place on the exhibition floor (Faber, 2011:31). In the early 1950s the museum had to bring the Africa collection back to an acceptable standard. In the exhibitions of the 1950's the museum had a strong focus on South Africa. Apparently both countries saw the historical ties and linguistic affinity as a strong basis for political and economic cooperation (Faber, 2011: 30). In 1951, a cultural treaty was signed and the following year many festivities were held in both countries to commemorate the landing of Van Riebeeck at the Cape 300 years earlier. The Tropenmuseum organised the exhibition 'South Africa 300 years'. This exhibition showed historical documents, maps, paintings and personal objects originating from a large number of Dutch organisations and private individuals who provided objects on loan (Faber, 2012: 31). The exhibition relied heavily on the Dutch and Afrikaner contribution, with a strong focus on figures such as Kruger, Botha and Smuts.

The Tropenmuseum also focused on Congo, due to the strong trading relationship between the Netherlands and lower Congo and because Congo was still a colony of Belgium at the time. This made it easy for the Netherlands to trade and collect objects to expand their collection. In 1951, the museum exhibited Congolese ethnographic objects in combination with paintings of Floris Jesper under the title: 'The Congolese in Western and His Own Art' (Faber, 2011: 31). The museum was very careful not to display anything related to the 'colonial mindset.' However, the methods and themes that were chosen were actually quite related to this 'colonial mindset'.

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Although South Africa was not an official colony of the Netherlands at the time, the Dutch did have strong ties with South Africa and commemorated Van Riebeeck's influence in the country. At the time, the term 'colonial' was more connected to the actual former colonies of the Netherlands than to long term trading partners or other countries. The fact that Congo was still a colony of Belgium did not hinder the decision of the museum to exhibit ethnographic objects from Congo.

The presentations on South Africa and Congo are perceived as the prelude to the development of an Africa Department in which the entire continent was presented. These exhibitions also demonstrate how countries such as South Africa and Congo have been represented over the years. The 'Sahara' exhibition from 1961, displayed native environments that granted the public an opportunity to imagine themselves in this ecosystem through a large entrance hall with desert sand. The first formal Africa Department was opened after this exhibition.

There were multiple debates within the institute and the museum whether or not the Africa Department was actually necessary. It was agreed upon that the Africa Department should focus on the most important aspects of African society, including concepts such as patriarchal familial relations, secret societies, seasonal labour and political life (Faber, 2011: 34). In the late 1960s, the museum slightly changed its policy, as it sought to expand their collection with extensive field research. The museum set an example in Africa where existing expertise could be combined with the objectives of the newly formulated policy. The search led them to the Samo, a small community in Burkina Faso.

The community served as a model for a development issue to which Dutch engineers perhaps could find answers. To be able to produce the most truthful picture possible, numerous aspects of these people's lives were recorded on film and audiotapes as well as in photography and text. The collected objects were primarily chosen for their functional capacity. The main point of focus was the representation of daily life rather than beauty. The trust of the local people was needed to collect good and reliable material. Therefore, some employees stayed in the area for longer periods of time. During the exhibition, visitors felt as though they were in the 'Third World' and had gained insight into the nature and size of the problems (Faber, 2011: 38). Faber

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(2011) argues this was quite progressive for the time. The collecting and exhibiting history of the Africa collections shows how the ethnological museum continuously tries to relate to society and to what the viewer wants to see. In these exhibitions, the visitor gained insight and 'learned' how people live in other places of the world. It did not only display the material culture but also showed the viewer the problems of the community, and introduced these as issues which could be 'fixed' by Dutch engineers.

In the 1980s, the ethnological museums were even more concerned with social engagement. The first temporary exhibition devoted to Africa after the reorganisation was the retrospective exhibition 'Modern Art in Africa', held in 1980. The exhibition consisted of works from 14 countries and is said to be illustrative of the new direction the Tropenmuseum wanted to pursue. The presentation policy aimed to 'uncover prevailing social issues surrounding development cooperation' (Faber, 2011: 45). The exhibition displayed a range of artworks that were primarily characterised by the fact that they had little to do with those art forms which, up to then, had been seen as classical or traditional art. Namely, masks, figures and ceremonial objects (Faber, 2011: 45).

However, there were a couple of flaws in the 'Modern Art in Africa' exhibition, South Africa was unrepresented, there was little from francophone West Africa, and academically trained artists were not at all on show (Faber, 2011: 45). It was at this time that the museums started to question whether the development of knowledge and activities in the area of modern art in Africa and elsewhere was a task for the ethnological museum or for the art museums. To explore this question, a symposium was organised in 1985, 'Modern Art in Developing Countries' (Faber, 2011: 45). Representatives from the modern art sector did not feel very drawn to modern art from Africa. Hence, the first initiatives to portray African modern art remained a task for the ethnographic museums in the Netherlands.

This new focus of ethnological museums gave the museums a chance to redirect conceptions about art. The ethnological museum could now also showcase modern art and relate it to social, economic and political circumstances in African countries. The ethnological museum had certainly done this before to a certain extent. Yet, their new

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interested was set on modern art. This shift is exemplified in the attitude the Tropenmuseum has exhibited towards South Africa ever since. The museum had previously commemorated Van Riebeeck by organising an exhibition with the South African Embassy, but now it was concerned with the political situation in South Africa.

The Tropenmuseum became a platform where the citizens of Amsterdam, and Dutch people more generally, could show their solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle. Several exhibitions related to the anti-apartheid movement were organised here. Of these exhibitions, the 1989-1990 exhibition 'White on Black' or 'Images of Blacks in Western Popular Culture' achieved the largest social impact. This exhibition used a collection on 'Negrophilia' – popular representations of Africa and people of colour in the West – to show how racial stereotypes had been created and perpetuated in the West through slavery and colonialism (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992: 15). The repeating strength of negative stereotypes was made clear in an overwhelming manner (Faber, 2011: 44). This demonstrates the attempts of the Tropenmuseum to alter the traditional ethnological ways in which Africa was represented before. These shifts should also be seen in a particular social context. During this time, the Netherlands was becoming more multicultural and the museum consequently felt that the need to adopt its policies to the changing audience.

The Wereld Museum in Rotterdam also placed an emphasis on the presentation of "art" in its cultural context. This context was no longer perceived as static but as a dynamic context that is subject to change. In 1987 the museum presented the best pieces from the entire collection in the exhibition 'Treasures from the Museum of Ethnology Rotterdam'. The exhibitions 'Second Burial: Mourning in Africa 1988' and 'Sages, Witches and Saints: Aging in Africa in 1994', strove with the help of the aesthetic power of the artworks, to confront the visitor with essential facets of African world views (Beumer & Abspoel, 2000: 21). It seemed at this point that the ethnological museum had entered the postcolonial era and became increasingly conscious about its role in society. In this new global constellation, the ethnological museums had once again the educational mandate of delineating the 'Other' (Leyten, 1992: 20). For a long time it was believed that contemporary African art had to be

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visibly connected with 'traditional religion, cosmology or mythology' in order to be authentic (Leyten, 1992: 20).

The Wereld Museum Rotterdam organised the 'Africa meets Africa' in 2002, the exhibition was named this way because it travelled to South Africa. The acquisition policy of the Wereld Museum, which stretches back for more than a century, reflects the changing attitude of the museum towards African art. Beumer and Abspoel (2002) identified how this attitude prevailed in three different time periods. During the first period, Africa was considered a 'dark continent': obscure, un-Christianized, and pervaded by occult threats. In this period objects such as masks, fetishes and weapons got considerable interest. This period was also heavily influenced by the discipline of social anthropology, a field which traditionally had been the home of the study of the 'savage'. The 'savage' always stood in contrast with the 'civilized'. The 'savage' was perceived as non-historical and the 'civilized' as historical. The art objects were perceived as manifestations of the life of the dark mysterious 'savage'. The second period was more focused on mundane aspects, as the museum tried to acquire collections that afforded a more representative view of everyday life in various cultures (Beumer & Abspoel, 2000: 22). The last, present-day period is concerned with highlighting the aesthetic quality of African art in order to foster respect for the continent's cultures and worldviews.

This history of African art at ethnological museums corresponds with the dominant discourse of European history. As Chakrabarty (1992) has stated, the writing of history always happens in phases of improvement and human progress. Although, it goes beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyse the production of history around African art, it is important to keep in mind the influence these dominant narratives have on alternative histories. As Hegel (1956) asserted, Africa seemed to lack a history of its own. It was common belief that the history of Africa began the moment the Europeans came to Africa and started documenting events and the way Africans lived. The histories of the art objects are often derived from European travellers and collectors. These narratives were often accepted as being representative for the history of the collection. Later, the aesthetic value of the art objects was taken into account and appreciated. The last period- where African art is viewed and appreciated for its aesthetics- relates to a teleological view of history which poses ultimate civilization

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and democracy as the single progressive goal. Chakrabarty (1992) argues that other histories are always seen in comparison and as a lack in comparison to the dominant European discourse on history. This view has influenced the politics of the representation of Africa in the museum.

2.4. The politics of Representation of Africa within the Ethnological Museum

From the first section of this chapter it is clear that the history of collecting and exhibiting African art at ethnological museums in the Netherlands is long and strongly informed by the disciplines of anthropology and ethnology. In this second section, I will analyse one exhibition in depth in order to understand how, after this long history of representing the 'Other', Africa is represented at ethnological museums today. The current policies of the museums are influenced by multiple factors. The exhibition 'Familieverhalen uit Zuid-Afrika' demonstrates what these factors are and how the politics of representation have influenced decisions taken around the exhibition.

2.4.1. Family Stories from South Africa

In 2002, the Tropenmuseum held another exhibition on South Africa called, 'Familieverhalen uit Zuid-Afrika'. The decision to adopt a new approach was relevant, in view of the changes in the Tropenmuseum and, particularly those in South Africa itself (Faber, 2011: 50). The exhibition focused on one representative from 4 or 5 different generations as the main vehicle for displaying family stories, covering part of the 20th century.

The highly experimental approach to this exhibition sought to enable those involved to present their stories in their own ways. The exhibition texts were based on interviews, diaries and letters, and were written in the first person. The exhibition showcased works of art made by artists such as Willy Bester, Penny Siopis, Berni Searle and Sam Nhlengethwa, as well as photographic series by photographers such as George Hallet, Cedric Nunn and David Goldblatt.

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South African scholars, Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool travelled to the Netherlands to carry out research on this exhibition. The authors attempted to reverse the ethnographic gaze and make the 'west' native. Witz and Rassool's method of 'viewing' (2006) is interesting because it offers an alternative way of understanding the shifts in the representation of Africa within the ethnological museum. Witz and Rassool (2006) examined the aesthetics and the construction process of the exhibition at the Tropenmuseum. Their research explored ideas of the 'museum message' and the 'institutional life' through which these messages were created (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 738). Witz and Rassool (2006) wanted to establish the associations between a specific display in the museum, the much wider discussions around the representation of society in the Netherlands and the networks through which the subjects of display came to be constituted.

This method offers a possibility to understand the role of ethnological museums in society today. Moreover, seeing ethnographic collections in a broader perspective allows one to see the collection through a multiple gaze. The processes of exhibition-making are the domains in which publics are 'conceptualised and produced' (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 738). The exhibition sought to challenge ethnic and racial categories that were prescribed by the apartheid state while attempting to drive the creation and demonstration of new identities that were outside of these bounds (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 738).

The concept of 'the family' was chosen to represent the shifting and changing identities in post-apartheid South Africa. Witz and Rassool (2006) were interested in how the tensions between these different modes of representation were constantly negotiated. These shifts should be seen in the context of the museological changes that were and are taking place in the Netherlands. Ethnological museums became increasingly aware of their position in society and realised that the ways exhibitions were produced was slowly changing. The agency of the subjects became important, and therefore, the families were also invited to be involved for the exhibition-making process. Witz and Rassool (2006) argue that one of the main problems of the exhibition was the use of ethnic categories, specifically because these often enabled the retention of the boundaries that the exhibition explicitly sought to transgress.

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The use of ethnic categories in post-apartheid South Africa is rather problematic because the boundaries between who uses these categories and who is supposedly entitled to use these categories are not always clear. In addition, the fact that the categories are used in South Africa, for instance by the government, does not imply the same categories can be used outside of South Africa. Witz and Rassool (2006) suggest that the use of ethnic categorisations might be part of a wider discourse of representation in post-apartheid South Africa where ethnicity is being reframed as cultural diversity. This wider discourse is connected with current discourses of representation in the Netherlands because the ethnological museum wants to cater to all audiences and be representative of Dutch society.

Because of its commitment to become a more inclusive and multicultural museum, the museum felt the need to restructure the relationships between its different audiences and displays. The Tropenmuseum showed that it not only wanted to represent South African society today but also wanted to explore how it could narrate history in the present. Every stage of the exhibition's production was made in close collaboration with South Africans in South Africa. The South African families had the agency to decide how South Africa and the families would be represented to the audiences in the Netherlands. According to Witz and Rassool (2006) in presenting the making of the exhibition in this way the process seems almost passive. Because there was an emphasis on the making of the exhibition in South Africa, the crucial decision-making, conceptualisation and construction of the exhibition in Amsterdam are left out of the picture. Witz and Rassool (2006) place these elements back into the production process and argue that the exhibition was as much, and maybe even more, one that was about the Netherlands. The Tropenmuseum stated that the exhibit was initially intended to travel to South Africa but its primary display environment became the Tropenmuseum itself, because it needed to attract paying customers to come to the exhibition (Faber, Rassool and Witz, 2007: 75).

It is important to understand how ethnological museums choose to represent Africa today. Decision-making around the representation of South Africa is a good example of how ethnological museums are trying to shift away from traditional ethnological approaches. The curators rejected the ethnographic model but considered the 'country exhibition' where the idea is to portray images about the country that can counter

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dominant media responses (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 746). The curator of the exhibition, Paul Faber, had a strong interest in representing the ways that identities shifted, changed and formed. Faber drew on the paradigm of social history. As an exhibition apparatus, the family provided an accessible meeting point for Dutch museum audiences from different social backgrounds, who themselves were constituted as families (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 747).

As Ramdas (2004) has argued, the role of ethnological museums in multicultural societies is questionable. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to connect to this 'new audience'. The Tropenmuseum found that the use of families could function as the much needed connection with the audience. The concept of 'the family' did not only work for South African families but also for Dutch society in multiple ways. Witz and Rassool (2006) argue that the 'family concept' was part of a trajectory that rejected the emerging notion of individualism that had been prominent in previous decades. Focussing on the family and 'family values,' allowed for the appreciation of the traditional Dutch family while providing a way to deal with the relatively new multicultural family. The exhibition had a clear purpose:

> To narrate how people with complex life histories live together, how families and other identities are constituted and reconstituted in changing historical circumstances, and how people choose to associated with these identities on a personal level, particularly in multicultural societies.
>
> (Bouman, Faber, Lêgene, 2001)

Other exhibitions in the Netherlands also focused on 'the family' to reflect upon Dutch society. One of the most notable was, 'Rotterdammers' at the Wereld Museum. This exhibition used members of 10 Rotterdam families from various parts of the world to tell about their story across generation in contemporary multicultural Rotterdam. This exhibition reflected how first generation migrant groups took their culture with them to Rotterdam. At the same time it showed how the second and third generation of migrants created a mix of cultures in their music, language and dress (Bouman, Faber, Lêgene, 2001).

This evinces that by choosing the 'family' as a central concept of the exhibition, South Africa became a lesson in multiculturalism and an example of how people make choices in their lives by drawing upon their family (Witz & Rassool, 2006:

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748). According to Witz and Rassool (2006: 750), 'the goal of achieving diversity in the Netherlands motivated the use of ethnic groups – and not with the 'same connotations that these ethnic groups may have invoked in South Africa'. This was apparently confirmed by visitor patterns because the family selections resonated with specific cultural groupings in Dutch society (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 750). It is difficult for a Dutch audience to navigate through differences between ethnicity and culture, and the shifting of identities between several groups. Therefore, the discourse of multiculturalism was constructed in terms of the 'Rainbow Nation', and became a way of 'recasting ethnicities unproblematically as culture' (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 750). The exhibition made a decent attempt to go beyond ideas of ethnic categories and the ideal representation of the 'Rainbow Nation' but it also failed to start a constructive dialogue around the politics of representation. Debate around these issues could have been of use for questions that relate to multiculturalism in the Netherlands.

The 'Family Stories' exhibition and its modes of representation are important for understanding the shifts that ethnological museums are trying to make. This exhibition is a good example because the curators and the museum were very conscious of contested ideas around culture, identity and race in post-apartheid South Africa. At the same time, the curators and the museum tried to attract a multicultural audience by offering an invisible mirror to the 'new visitor'. With this, the museum clearly sought to bridge the space between the previously constructed 'Other' and the ethnological museum.

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2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed some key points in the history of collecting and exhibiting African art at Ethnological museums in the Netherlands. This history gives insight into how ethnological museums arose and how they functioned in society. The coloniality of disciplines such as anthropology and ethnology have informed and influenced the acquisition policies of ethnological museums. With regard to African art, the history of collections and their objects goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, in this history there are some factors that are key to recognising shifts in the representation of Africa within the ethnological museum. The appreciation of African art goes in stages. The objects were first seen as dark

mysterious objects that belonged to the uncultured 'savages.' Subsequently, there was a strong interest in how the 'Other' lived, with museums displaying objects that placed an emphasis on how the 'Other' functioned. Finally, after this stage the ethnological museum became more concerned with its social engagement. The 'Family Stories from South Africa' exhibition almost features as some sort of endpoint of this long and extensive history of African art in the Netherlands. The ethnological museum is now a conscious entity that is aware of its position in a changing society and attempts to legitimise its existence by changing its attitude towards exhibiting the 'Other.'

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Chapter 3

Africa Collections at Ethnological Museums: Ethnology or Heritage?

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will address how the representation of Africa in the ethnological museum is intertwined with the construction of African heritage in the Netherlands. In the previous chapter, I briefly outlined the history of collecting and exhibiting African art at Dutch ethnological museums. The 'Family Stories from South Africa' exhibition has given us insight into how complicated the politics of representing Africa are within the ethnological museum. As I have argued, this is due to the changing role of the ethnological museum and the need for museums to adapt their policies to different audiences and different times. The representation of Africa in the ethnological museum and the construction of African heritage in the Netherlands are connected.

In this chapter, I will explain how and why heritage discourse can be used in this context. First, I will describe how heritage is defined and understood in this context, as both discourse and cultural process. Heritage is multifaceted and relates to the individual and the communal, as much as it does to the past and the present. Therefore, the term and its use should be examined closely. Second, I will discuss the relationship between ethnology and heritage. The relationship between both discourses is complex and ethnology museums experience several challenges when collections are revaluated as heritage. These challenges are related to understanding the role of culture and the heritage of ethnology itself. Third, I will discuss if the Africa collections, which I have analysed in the previous chapter, are seen as ethnology or heritage.

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3.2. Understanding Heritage

The notion of heritage is a rather complex one, scholars and heritage practitioners have defined and described heritage in several ways. Because heritage relates to the tangible and the intangible, as much as it relates to the present and the past, it is hard to formulate a definition that encompasses the multifaceted nature of heritage. There is a proliferation of charters, conventions and resolutions that deal with cultural property, underwater heritage, world and natural heritage and the protection of historic towns and urban areas.[7] UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) have been at the forefront in defining a common terminology and scope for heritage since 1965 (Ahmad, 2006: 294).

By the end of the 20th century, the scope of heritage, in general, was agreed to include tangible and intangible heritage. The definition of intangible heritage is now also incorporated in the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.[8] The terminology and definitions can offer a better understanding of what is seen and defined as heritage within the international community. There are several ways in which heritage can be understood. These can be guided by a legal lens but also through a practitioner's lens.

Although the fields of heritage and heritage studies are rather new phenomena, it should be kept in mind that, as Harvey (2001) argues, people have always been involved in the production of heritage. All societies have a past, although not every society wishes to engage with this past. Through understanding what people convey about their past, in the form of forgetting, remembering or memorialising, heritage studies can engage on a broader level with academic debates (Harvey, 2001: 3).

Heritage is a field that is managed through certain institutions and codes. Heritage sites, from nature parks to memorials, are all managed through different bodies. At the same time, there are practitioners who actively work in this relatively new field.

[7] *See* World Heritage Convention, UNESCO, 1972; Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, UNESCO, 1972; Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas, ICOMOS, 1987, Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage, ICOMOS, 1996.
[8] Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2003.

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These heritage practitioners play a part in defining and constructing ideas of what constitutes as heritage and what does not. These forms of understanding heritage are rather prescriptive and are informed by the particular set of archives that produce a specific heritage. It can be argued that these sets of rules together form heritage discourse. These rules set out what is heritage and what is not. In addition, these rules determine what is seen as cultural heritage, tangible heritage and intangible heritage. The rules and regulations also determine how 'the heritage' will be conserved and preserved. Smith has labelled this 'type' of heritage as the 'authorized heritage discourse'. Although Smith (2006) analyses and problematises this 'authorized heritage discourse', she also takes into account the materiality of heritage.

This 'governed' type of heritage does often not include the view of heritage as cultural process. This discourse works to naturalise certain assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage (Smith, 2006: 4). Here, Smith (2006) refers to the process of naturalising certain narratives and cultural experiences that are often linked to ideas of nation and nationhood.

Heritage as cultural process could be referred to as a different 'type' of heritage that is far less governed and hard to define. This 'type' of heritage exists alongside the discourse on heritage. Its existence could possibly challenge the dominant discourse on heritage. Smith (2006) explores the meaning of the idea of heritage as a cultural and social process. This process relates to the deeper understanding and relationship between heritage and culture. In this view, all heritage is also intangible (Smith, 2006: 3). The adoption of this approach takes into account that heritage can have a meaning for individuals or for a community that is not laid down in rules or regulations. Objects and sites can have multiple meanings and functions for communities that cannot be regulated.

This type of heritage relates to our own relationship with history and to questions of culture, identity and citizenship. Also, this type of heritage is not as regulated as the first type of heritage described above. Defining this second notion of heritage is problematic because it does not have set boundaries. Rather it relates to a myriad of ideas that exist in relation to defining the past and the present and the role of heritage in this process. Marschall (2010) argues that heritage is difficult to define because it is

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all encompassing, heritage relates to tangible sites and memorials, as well as landscapes and the intangible aspects of culture such as traditions and oral memory. How communities and people relate and remember, commemorate or forget these intangible aspects is hard to govern and regulate. Yet, sometimes some sort of regulation is needed to make sure they are not dismissed as unimportant.

For the postcolony, former colonial buildings, museums and memorial sites are often subject of debate. But also intangible heritage in the form of loss and injustice is a widely shared experience in the postcolony. De Jong and Rowlands (2008: 132) argue that heritage can offer the possibility of 'renewal and re-engagement' for this loss or *nostalgia*. Heritage is then used as a medium to come to 'terms with the past' or to remember this past. Shepherd (2008) argues that heritage discourse can be used as a medium to relate to issues such as culture, identity and citizenship. These issues are often intertwined with the remembering of certain events in history.

In Europe, heritage is often is often seen as a way to define one's identity and recognise others (De Jong & Rowlands, 2008: 131). Ideas around Europe and heritage are constructed in several ways. There are different levels and conceptions of "European culture" and "cultures of Europe" (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 156). Pieterse (1995) argues, furthermore, that ideas about "European culture" are strongly dependent on the Enlightenment image of development, where culture is regarded as something to be protected and cultivated.

Several European countries have actively worked with the notion of heritage because they are faced with increasingly globalised contexts and phenomena such as multicultural societies. It can thus be argued that heritage now has been expanded as a mode of cultural production, popular interest and state discourse. McGregor and Schumaker (2006: 649) argue that the use of heritage has promoted nostalgic, consumerist and 'closed' understandings of the past, but also a 'wealth of constructive critical engagement'. It is this constructive engagement that is of interest.

In this section, I have described two forms of heritage that are quite different but still related to each other. Heritage discourse in the Netherlands is influenced by European ideas around heritage. In addition, multiculturalism has been a reason for museums to

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move away from ethnological approaches to a more inclusive heritage approach. Ethnological museums in the Netherlands have been active in the construction and formation of heritage discourse. I differentiate between the dominant discourse on heritage that consists of certain rules, regulations and museum practice and between heritage as a social process that has a deeper understanding of the importance of intangible heritage. This does not mean, that these different forms cannot exist next to each other or do not inform each other. Both forms are constantly evolving and it could be that the less governed form of heritage might form a challenge to the dominant discourse of heritage in the Netherlands.

3.3. Ethnology and Heritage

Seeing ethnological collections through the heritage lens is not unproblematic. African art collections at ethnological museums in the Netherlands have for a long time been part of the field of ethnology. Analysing these collections through the heritage lens and understanding what they mean in terms of Dutch cultural heritage cannot be done without understanding the relationship between heritage and ethnology. There are some tensions between the disciplines of ethnology and heritage that have influenced the production of knowledge around the collections. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) made a set of claims about the relationship between ethnology and heritage that gives insight into the ways the heritage discourse works.

Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues that ethnology is implicated in the production of heritage, even though it has a complicated relationship with its own past. Therefore, it would be problematic if heritage were viewed as a discipline that was non-existent at the moment that ethnology was existent. Moreover, this would suggest that until the heritage discourse came into existence and was widely recognised by academics, the art objects that belong to ethnological museums were not part of a certain heritage. This is also problematic because it would suggest that the so-called value or importance of objects is dependent on a dominant discourse that determines this value or importance. Heritage did not suddenly 'come into existence', the art objects already were seen as possessing a certain heritage before they were labelled heritage through heritage discourse.

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Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 5) makes two other interesting claims, the first is that 'ethnology has the ability to make culture disappear and to let it reappear as ethnology in the museum'. The notion of culture in this regard can be slightly problematic, especially since there were different modes of culture at play when the art objects belonging to the museums' permanent collections were bought, collected or looted. The collectors and museums that exhibited the art objects wanted to showcase certain perspectives of the culture that the art objects belonged to. As has been argued earlier, the culture that is exhibited is not particularly representative of the culture in the past or present.

In the early days of ethnology, the term 'African' culture was often used as if the whole continent had a singular culture, namely the 'African' one. Objects were seen as representative of this 'African' culture, something that has partly been deconstructed by the ethnology museum itself. In Chapter One, I have set out the multiple perceptions of culture that are relevant in this context. It is evident that the relation between the art objects and 'African culture' is rather ambiguous as it heavily depends on how culture is determined and by whom. As Garuba and Radithalo (2008) point out, questions of culture have, in general, become pertinent to many more disciplines than we would traditionally associate it with. Although heritage may seem the obvious discipline where plays a role, it is also one of the more complicated disciplines in which to position culture.

The second interesting claim that Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 5) makes is that ethnology tends to 'repudiate its own history'. The ethnology museum also has its 'own heritage'. The heritage of the ethnological museum is embedded in the collections and closely related to the history of the collections. In addition, the museum site in itself also has its 'own heritage'. Here, I hope to set out how ethnological museums deal with this heritage. Ethnological museums in the Netherlands deal with their heritage in different ways. Often, temporary modern art exhibitions offer a possibility for ethnological museums to demonstrate a different side of the museums. Moreover, African artists and curators are involved in this process and in the production of the actual exhibitions. Both the Tropenmuseum and the Wereld Museum have organised Africa exhibitions that eventually travelled to

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Africa. It is complex for the ethnological museums to alter the way the permanent Africa collections are displayed.

The Wereld Museum and the Museum Volkenkunde have engaged in various contemporary projects focused on Africa but have partly failed in representing Africa differently through their permanent collections. Both museums still utilise regional categories that are often derived from the colonial divisions, and locate objects in the museums as representative of this regional culture (Witz & Rassool, 2006: 734). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues that the scientific devaluation of ethnographic collections– as ethnology moves on to other concerns – paves the way for their revaluation as heritage. This revaluation could also entail a change within museum policies. According to Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 7), this revaluation can be understood by seeing heritage as a 'mode of cultural production'.

As I have discussed earlier, heritage is used and understood in different ways. Heritage can be used as state discourse but also as a means of popular interest. As Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 1) argues, heritage is created through 'metacultural operations' that extend 'museological values' and methods to 'living persons, their knowledge, practices, artefacts, social worlds, and life spaces'. The power of heritage as cultural production lies in its manageability and in its ability to be easily harmonized with human rights and democratic values- something that is often desirable for nation or state building projects. Where ethnology distanced the art objects, heritage pulls the visitors back to the art objects through claiming that the visitor is part of the exhibition or that the collection is part of their heritage. In this view, heritage becomes the key *raison d'etre* for ethnological museums and offers ethnological museums a chance to consciously reinvent themselves.

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3.4. The Role of the Ethnological Museum

Leiden's Museum Volkenkunde has initiated a project with several artists with as main subject, the 'Ethnological Museum' to understand the role of the ethnological museum in a changing society. The museum invited a group of prominent artists to put forward their views on crossing the historical divides between ethnological and so-called 'modern' or 'Western art'. Because the museum carries the burden of

history into present time, the artists and the museums questioned if the museum had a historical responsibility. The main issue being, how relevant can the museum be in an age of so-called globalisation? Even though the artists were not all African, and the project was not directly related to the Africa collection, it does demonstrate how the ethnological museum has dealt with these important questions. The works that the artists made offer interpretations of the illusions and ideals of the practice of ethnology.

The Museum Volkenkunde still largely adheres to the practice of displaying traditional or neo-traditional aspects of material culture (Vos, 2004: 21). The museum still has a large Africa collection with art objects from the Tellem, Djenne, Asante and from Benin.[9] In one sense, the museum assumes its natural role, namely of conserving the old. Yet, it no longer anticipates cultural or material change as it once did (Vos, 2004: 21). One could argue that the museum tried to offer a different context whilst keeping in mind its primary function. Vos (2004) argues that the museum does not hide its colonial background but attempts instead to incorporate this historical given by indicating how the artefacts on display have become part of the collection. The fundamental functions of the ethnological museum are conservation, research and display. These functions do not only form the foundation of the museum but also to a great extent determine how culture of the 'Other' is displayed.

However, the commodification of culture, in some ways, goes against incorporating the historical background. Vos (2004) argues that the commodification of culture is, in a way, an easy way out for ethnological museums because they do not have to engage in a critical dialogue. Ethnological museums often believe that the commodification of culture fits into globalising and multicultural societies, granting the museum, albeit indirectly, a right to exist. Does the ethnological museum have a historical responsibility towards the multicultural society? Ramdas (2004) argues, that the ethnological museum has a vital role in society today, as it can play an important role in the teaching of tolerance and understanding. Seeing the collections of ethnological museums through a heritage lens, and the museum as the gatekeeper of heritage, means that the museums begin to connect to society in a different way.

[9] The collection does not provide further information on the origin of the objects that come from Benin.

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Ramdas (2004: 24) argues that this also means that the museum will have to accept the 'artificiality of ethnological categorisations', thus abandoning the whole concept of 'ethnicity'. Secondly, it means that the museum has to 'portray the chronological and historical modification of 'identities' through an interactive registration of all the world's cultures' (Ramdas, 2004: 24). But how does an ethnological museum replace the concept of 'ethnicity'? The role of the museum might be subject to change but the permanent collections are still housed at the museum, and in this case, will remain at the museum. Ramdas (2004) poses two vital questions; what are the defining elements of the concept of 'identity that should replace the traditional defining elements of the concept 'ethnicity'? And second, 'what is the degree to which harmony can in fact be realised?' Ramdas (2004) argues the first step should be acknowledging difference. The second step should then be questioning if the 'Other' is actually still the same 'Other'. The 'Other' might not be the same 'Other,' but the grid that underlies the process of 'Othering' might be unchanged. As I set out in Chapter Two, the process of 'Othering' should be seen in a historical context. The 'Other' is not seen and viewed in the museum as 'primitive' or as 'savage' anymore but just because the historical context changed does not mean the process of 'Othering' has changed in itself.

The answer for ethnological museums lies in engaging differently with the 'Other' but also with society as a whole. The Museum Volkenkunde, for one, records 300 years of history, including the imperialist era, thereby representing the colonial past of the Netherlands. As Edward Said (1978) argues in his work, studying other cultures always involves a power relationship. This is even more so for exhibiting other cultures in the ethnological museum. Only the temporary exhibitions, such as the 'Familieverhalen uit Zuid-Afrika' exhibition at the Tropenmuseum, offer the possibility for African artists and cultural creatives to step into the process. Does this then mean that the ethnological museum is inherently related with the process of 'Othering'?

Permanent collections and exhibitions are often still categorised according to ethnic categories that are non-existant in today's world. Perhaps it is not that easy to replace the concept of "ethnicity" within the museum. The heritage of the ethnology museum itself is something that can never be overlooked or taken for granted. As Said (1978)

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has pointed out 'cultural hegemony has given Orientalism the durability and strength to survive'. This is still relevant today in multicultural societies. Thus, Africa can be represented in a more globalised context but it might not directly change the process of 'Othering'. As Said (1978) himself points out, 'if one wants to study cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative perspective, one has to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power'. In other words, the relationship of knowledge and power that underlies the representation of 'Others' is strongly connected to the existence of the museum. However, the museum could rethink the power of knowledge production around the Africa collections in the museum through engaging with their historic responsibility.

Historic responsibility plays a major role in the relationship between knowledge and power. Dominant narratives around the Africa collections can be countered if ethnology museums take their historic responsibility seriously. A good example of how ethnological museums struggle with this role is found at the South African Museum. This museum displayed the so-called Bushman diorama for a long time. The diorama falls within the traditional scope of ethnology. The displayed figures were created using life casts made from living Khoisan people. The exhibit reinforced popular stereotypes of "the primitive" being prehistoric and unchanging (Butler, 2000: 79). The Bushman body has, and continues to be a site of violence and invasion, which is to a great extent illustrated by the diorama (O'Connell, 2008: 38). The Diorama became an artefact in its own right. While the diorama is not open to the public anymore, it still resides in the museum.

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The so-called Bushman Diorama is highly contested within museology and heritage discourse. It depicts the former practices of museums and how the past of ethnological museums is hard to repudiate, even as museums believe that this is possible through reinvention. The fact that the Bushman Diorama is closed but not gone says as much about museum practices in the present as the fact that the display was open in the past.

The museum has a double responsibility when it comes to dealing with the diorama, it is responsible for making it and it is responsible for what it says about museum practice. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 6) states that every attempt to deal with this

display is problematic – 'whether to cover it up, explain and apologize for it, add warning labels – foregrounds the museum itself, its operations, history, and, in retrospect, its mistakes'. The diorama is now considered to be part of South African cultural heritage. Not only the diorama itself but also the context and the history of the diorama are part of this cultural heritage. However, the problem with ethnological museums that reinvent themselves from traditional ethnological museums to gatekeepers of cultural heritage is that they often also decide how this shift takes place. This example demonstrates that the ethnological museum cannot revaluate itself as heritage keeper without constantly engaging with its own historical responsibility.

3.5. African Art Collections: Ethnology or Heritage?

In the previous chapter, I discussed some aspects of the Africa collections at three Dutch ethnological museums. It goes beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the objects of the different collections and their individual history. However, the policies of the ethnology museums and the way the museums have dealt with the permanent collections give insight into the different representations of Africa within ethnological museums. These shifts in representation are intertwined with the construction of heritage. The ethnology museum has played a major role in constructing a heritage narrative around the collections. This is to a great extent due to the cultural performativity of the ethnological museum.

The meaning that was ascribed to the objects in the past is still relevant today for the construction of the heritage discourse around the collections. Heritage is not static and is constantly in transition. It does not have a linear process of construction but is influenced by the past as much as it by the present. The terms 'past' and 'present' suggest that both are static positions at opposite sides of the linear scale. However, within the second 'type' of heritage, time exists in a process of non-linearity. Parsons (2006: 669) argues that we should remind ourselves that 'artefacts and sites, have been through many states of construction, cleaning and polishing before they reach public presentation'. This public presentation or actual representation is vital to understanding the role of ethnological museums. As Garuba (2007: 133) has stated, 'the objects on display and the site itself acquire a second life, functioning as

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representations of themselves and their previous lives'. This indicates that the concept of performativity plays a major role within the ethnological museum.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the ethnological museum in the Netherlands has experienced shifts in the representation of Africa. These shifts are closely related to the performativity of the museum. The culture of the African art objects is staged and every section or category of the museum, in fact, forms an imagined traditional diorama that can be viewed through a peephole. The production of knowledge around the Africa collections is not limited to the museum space. The performativity of the museum does not only relate to how exhibitions are designed and constructed but also to the intangible heritage related to the collections and exhibitions. The legacy of the ethnological museum, amongst others, colonialism and slavery, inform the nature and meaning of the Africa collections. All of the ethnology museums in the Netherlands are related to this legacy and have acquired objects of the collection during this period.

Over time the representation of Africa at the museum has changed. This was due to the fact that the Netherlands was changing as a society. This also meant that the cultural performativity of the museum changed. The modes in which 'African' culture was displayed were reformed as well. Heritage played a big role in this process. As has been argued earlier, heritage became the *raison d'etre* for the ethnological museum. In some ways this was a natural process because it seemingly collided with the public opinion of society. When society believed that Van Riebeeck should be commemorated, the museum organised an exhibition, but when society condemned the apartheid regime in South Africa it also organised an exhibition on the anti-apartheid struggle. Despite the fact that this took place over a relatively long period of time, it does indicate that the ethnological museum adapts to trends in society. The objects of the Africa collections sometimes stem from hundreds of years ago and their actual existence in the museum is not representative of events in society today. However, the ethnology museums have these objects in storage and on display.

The ethnology museums in the Netherlands felt that instead of closing their doors they should rather become active guardians of Dutch cultural heritage. In order to do so, the ethnology museum used the heritage discourse in multiple ways. The Africa

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collections are seen as cultural heritage and objects of (ethnologic) knowledge that belong to the Dutch nation. At the same time the ethnology museum can play a different role in society by attracting multicultural audiences in the Netherlands. In this case, the ethnology museums have used heritage discourse to legitimise their existence and at the same time to attract the 'Other' as visitor.

The Africa collections are more than merely ethnologic objects, having meanings beyond the scope of ethnology. The objects were often not seen as art and the classification model or grid that determined the status of the objects was based on colonial ethnography. A lot of objects have a different story to tell than the captions in the museum tell the visitor. Over the years the ethnology museums have engaged in projects to understand their role in terms of historic responsibility for the collections. Some of these projects involved modern art exhibitions that differed from the traditional ethnologic way of exhibiting.

Through these exhibitions, the ethnology museums in the Netherlands demonstrated that they were conscious of their position in society, and aware of their history in the exhibition of ethnologic objects. The museum also had to legitimise, in one way or another, why it still owned these large Africa collections. The collections do not have the same scientific ethnologic value as the objects had before. Moreover, their value is now also measured in a different way. Heritage discourse allows the collections to have multiple values while enabling the collections to be part of different 'types' or 'forms' of heritage. The Africa collections are definitely part of different heritages, the museums heritage, the cultural heritage of the Netherlands and Africa's cultural heritage. This also means that the ethnologic history of the collections is part of the nature of the collections. Ethnology museums have several reasons to emphasise the cultural heritage nature of the collection.

Heritage discourse functions as the principal site to analyse this debate through, however, its relationship to the discourse of ethnology should not be disregarded in this debate. It is the field of colonial ethnology that has shaped the power relation between the collection and the museum. This has heavily influenced knowledge production around the collections. In addition, this has influenced the relationship

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between African art institutions and museums that are interested in tracing their heritage in European countries.

As I will discuss in the following chapter, African museums see the Africa collection of the World Museum as one that belongs to the various African art institutions. There is no simple answer to the question whether the collections are part of ethnology or of heritage. However, it may be clear that both fields have influenced the meaning of the collections today. The process of knowledge formation around the collections does not have to be static or linear. Analysing the Africa collections through the heritage discourse allows alternative narratives around the collections to exist next to each other.

3.6. Conclusion

The Africa collections and the exhibitions continue to be a site of contestation because of their history and the role of the ethnological museum. This is even more so in terms of the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam. In the following chapter, I will analyse the proposed sale and the meaning thereof through a heritage lens. In this chapter, I have set out the complicated nature of the concept of heritage. It is important to understand that various stakeholders use heritage in different ways. In Europe, the notion of heritage is often linked to multicultural society and understanding others within the same society. This is also true for the ethnology museum because it has transcended its traditional function of conserving the old. The ethnology museum has placed itself within society over the last years. It no longer exists on the margins, as it has embraced new social functions and meanings. The museum still conserves the old or what is now considered heritage. However, the ethnology museums will have to constantly engage with their historical responsibility as long as they define their right to existence through heritage discourse.

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Chapter 4

An Analysis of the Proposed Sale of the Africa Collection at the Wereld Museum Rotterdam

4.1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I analyse what the proposed sale means for heritage discourse in a multicultural society such as the Netherlands. First, I set out the main concerns with regard to the proposed sale. These concerns are related to the intangible and material nature of the collection and the representation of Africa in the museum. Secondly, I will address how the sale can be analysed through a heritage lens. This approach will give insight in the meaning of the proposed sale of the collection in the Netherlands through heritage discourse and through the view of heritage as cultural process.

4.2. Problematising the Proposed Sale of the Wereld Museum

As I set out earlier, the sale of the Africa collection can be understood in several ways. Analysing the sale through a museology or history lens might provide alternative views. Heritage discourse proves to be a vital site to analyse the proposed sale through because it allows for a broader understanding of the sale. Yet, dominant heritage discourse can also be limiting because it does not always take into account the intangible nature of heritage. The proposed sale, as I wish to argue in this chapter, is more than the mere sale of art objects that are being sold to generate money for the museum to survive. As I briefly explained earlier in this mini-dissertation, the main reason for the sale of the collection is the budget cuts the Dutch government is implementing in the arts and culture sector. The sale is problematic for two main reasons. The first reason relates to the intangible but also material aspects of the art objects. The second reason relates to the context of the representation of Africa in the ethnological museum and how the Wereld Museum represents Africa through this sale.

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4.2.1. The Intangible Nature of the Collection

As I discussed in the previous chapter, heritage should be understood as discourse as well as cultural process. The latter relates to the intangible nature of heritage differently. The intangible heritage of Africa collections in the Netherlands is of interest because it relates to the history of the Dutch in Africa. In addition, it relates to the circumstances in which art objects were collected and exhibited- namely, periods of slavery and colonialism. These are both rather broad periods of time and concepts but both periods have heavily influenced the formation of colonial ethnology, which later formed the ethnography museum. It is not always clear how the art objects were acquired and how many objects were looted or acquired illegitimately. The history on collecting African art demonstrates that it is often hard to trace how traders bought or traded objects.

As I explained in the second chapter, the history of Africa collections in the Netherlands is contested. During this period of time there often was an unequal power relationship between those who made the objects and *those* who bought or traded objects. Ideas about Africa and Africans were conveyed through travel stories and images, and influenced the way in which the collection was later seen in the museum space. This process of 'Othering' has long influenced the way in which other cultures were exhibited and viewed.

Therefore, the history around the collection is embedded in the meaning of the collection. In other words, the influence of slavery and colonialism and the dominant view of the West on Africa, form part of the intangible heritage of the collection. These circumstances have given the collection a certain meaning and influenced how the collections were represented in the museum. The meaning and function of the art objects also form part of the intangible heritage of the collection. Each and every object has a different meaning, for instance a sacred or cultural meaning, or function within a particular society.

Nowadays, the cultural heritage of such objects is recognised and promoted. The International Council of African Museums, AFRICOM and UNESCO have started various projects in Africa to stipulate the importance of cultural heritage. They also

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started projects to fight against the sale and export of special African art objects. One of the objections that can be read on the AFRICOM forum, used by African museums to express their view on the sale, is that sacred and cultural objects should not be sold.[10] The museums argue that these objects should either stay at the museum or be given back to the countries of origin.[11] Objections to the sale all stem from a communal view of the museums that the objects are part of African cultural heritage. Selling the objects would not take into consideration the intangible heritage of the collection.

Dutch museums, on the other hand, do not directly refer to the intangible heritage of the collection but to the obligation to protect cultural heritage. The other ethnology museums see the proposed sale as a loss in terms of Dutch cultural heritage. The ethnology museums in the Netherlands are all part of Stichting Volkenkundige Collectie Nederland (SVCN), an institute for the ethnological collections in the Netherlands. There are regulations such as the 'Leidraad voor Afstoting van Museale Objecten' (LAMO) that determine how museums can change their collections. However, this regulation is meant for the protection of cultural heritage not for selling collections. It is common that ethnology museums trade on a closed market if they want to change their collection. This way the collection remains part of Dutch cultural heritage.

A member of the Dutch parliament, Jasper van Dijk from the Socialist Party (SP), has asked the ministry of Education, Culture and Science about the function of the SVCN and LAMO in this regard.[12] In a letter the ministry responded that in the first place the municipality of Rotterdam and not the government has the responsibility to take into account the sensitive origin of the collection. The ethical ICOM and LAMO codes are seen as self-governing instruments. In other words, the museums have discretion to decide how and when the codes should be applied. Both codes do not prohibit the sale of cultural heritage to private collectors. However, the museums and owners of the

[10] AFRICOM Forum, Available at http://list.africom.museum/pipermail/africom-l_list.africom.museum/2011-September/002566.html, Opinion piece, available at: http://www.modernghana.com/news/347184/1/dutch-museum-to-sell-african-collection.html,
[11] *Id.,*
[12] It is common in the Dutch political system for parliament members to ask the relevant ministries questions about political issues. For the purpose of this chapter, I have translated the relevant answers to the questions.

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collection have a so-called duty of care for the collections. This letter has clarified the stance of the Dutch government on this issue. In the first place, the proposed sale is a matter that is decided upon by the museum and the municipality. The ICOM and LAMO codes leave room for interpretation and do not provide an exhaustive answer to the legality of the sale.

The conservation of cultural heritage also entails taking into account the historical responsibility for the collection. As I argued earlier in this mini-dissertation, this means taking responsibility for the way the collection was acquired and sharing this with the public. This fits in with the changing role of the ethnology museum. The context of the collections has become more and more important. Through defining collections as cultural heritage, the intangible nature of the collections also becomes important. Thus, museums have an obligation to also share the context of contested collections with the public. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues this is part of the obligation that comes with the museums own heritage. The Tropenmuseum can be seen as progressive in this regard because the origins of every object in the Africa collection are provided.

It becomes clear that museums in Africa see the meaning of the collection differently to Dutch museums when it comes to heritage. Heritage discourse in Africa is much more focused on the intangible heritage of the collection. Yet, it should be noted that this intangible heritage is also not extensively regulated in resolutions and conventions. The context of the acquired objects and the purpose of the objects are vital to any debate around African cultural heritage. African museums see the sale of sacred and cultural objects as the commodification of culture.[13] For the Wereld Museum the intangible heritage of the collection has not been a reason to keep the collection and find alternative funding. According to Bremner, the director of the Wereld Museum it is not an option for the museum to give the collection to African museums because they would not able to buy the collection, and the climate in Africa would not be appropriate for the African art objects.[14] The nature of this comment is

[13] AFRICOM Forum, Available at: http://list.africom.museum/pipermail/africom-l_list.africom.museum/2011-September/002566.html
, http://www.modernghana.com/news/347184/1/dutch-museum-to-sell-african-collection.html,
[14] AFRICOM Forum, Available at: http://list.africom.museum/pipermail/africom-l/2011-August/002543.html, http://list.africom.museum/pipermail/africom-l/2011-September/002566.html,

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rather problematic considering the history around the collection. The museum has not taken into account that such remarks could be seen as offensive for African museums who are more than willing to take on the collection. The African museums argue that the Wereld Museum has not shown any respect for the intangible heritage of the objects through proposing a sale that will profit the Wereld Museum.[15] The history around the collection and its intangible heritage make the proposed sale problematic. This is even more so, because the proposed sale in itself has shed light on the problematic history of the collection.

4.2.2. Representing Africa Differently

Through analysing the politics of representation that have influenced the way the collections have been exhibited at the museum one can identify a couple of changes in representation. The Tropenmuseum and its curators have thought a lot about the ways in which cultures and 'Other' people have been portrayed in the museum. Over the years the museum has adopted various approaches. The museum organised various exhibitions with African artists and curators to create more inclusive exhibitions. As the 'Familieverhalen uit Zuid-Afrika' exhibition demonstrates it remains difficult to represent Africa differently.

The Wereld Museum's 'Africa meets Africa' exhibition also sought to be more inclusive, namely by sharing the exhibitions with museums in South Africa. Although scholars critiqued both exhibitions, it could be argued that there were apparent changes in the representation of Africa in the museum space. These changes were reflected in several symposia that were organised, the production of exhibitions and the categorising of the permanent exhibitions. All three museums I have discussed have permanent Africa exhibitions that represent Africa in different ways. The Volkenkunde Museum and the Wereld Museum Rotterdam still use the colonial categories in the museum space to represent the art objects whilst the Tropenmuseum has changed the use of these categories.

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News articles, Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/17/us-finearts-netherlands-museums-idUSTRE77G38220110817, http://www.modernghana.com/news/347184/1/dutch-museum-to-sell-african-collection.html.

[15] Id.,

As I discussed earlier, the ethnological museum started to define itself and its right to existence in terms of heritage. One of the reasons for doing so was to connect to the changing audience in the Netherlands. The Tropenmuseum took this into consideration whilst organising the 'Familieverhalen uit Zuid-Afrika' exhibition. As Witz and Rassool (2006) pointed out with regard to this exhibition, the museum has committed to become more inclusive and made an attempt to restructure the relationships between its different audiences and displays. This is needed for the museum to become representative of Dutch society.

The changes in representation of Africa have a wider impact because they relate to broader discourses on representation at the ethnological museum. Representing Africa differently at the museum, especially countries such as South Africa, which is often labelled as a multicultural society, makes it easier for ethnological museums to legitimise their existence and connect to the changing audience. It is hard to analyse the extent to which this method is actually effective. Generally speaking one could argue that most ethnological museums in the Netherlands do promote cultural diversity but are not frequently visited by a multicultural audience.

In relation to the proposed sale, various Dutch radio and television programmes asked African citizens living in The Netherlands what they thought about the proposed sale.[16] All the people interviewed were opposed to the sale because part of their cultural heritage would disappear with the sale. The collection, according to those interviewed, was seen as a way to connect with their culture.[17] Most of the people also indicated that the Wereld Museum offered a way in which they could show cultural objects to their children.

Therefore, it can be argued that the representation of Africa in the ethnological museum has changed due to the shift from ethnology to heritage discourse. The first explanation behind this change is that the museums have broken away from traditional ethnological approaches. Perceptions on the 'Other' changed alongside of the traditional role of the ethnology museum. The second explanation relates to the

[16] http://www.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/wereldmuseum-rotterdam-wil-afrika-collectie-verkopen, http://www.rnw.nl/africa/radioshow/radio-show-conflict-south-sudan-border-region (part 2), http://www.eenvandaag.nl/economie/38440/wereldmuseum_rotterdam_wil_afrika_collectie_verkopen
[17] *Id.,*

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fact that the ethnology museum sought to connect to the changing society in the Netherlands. The Africa collections functioned as a medium to promote and celebrate cultural diversity.

4.3. Analysing the Proposed Sale through a Heritage Lens

In the first part of this chapter, I explained the problematic nature of the sale. In this part, I hope to analyse what the proposed sale means through a heritage lens. There are various stakeholders that could be possibly affected by the sale. On the one hand, other Dutch ethnological museums see the sale as a direct loss for Dutch cultural heritage. On the other hand, African museums find it highly problematic that the Wereld Museum would sell part of Africa's cultural heritage without consulting the African Museums. Despite such diverging viewpoints, debates between both stakeholders have virtually been inexistent.

As indicated earlier in this mini-dissertation, the proposed sale should not be seen in separation but against the background of collecting and exhibiting African art at ethnological museums in the Netherlands. Inherent to this are the issues of representing the 'Other' in the museum, the representation of the idea of Africa and the process of cultural performativity in the museum. Heritage discourse offers a possibility to analyse the sale against this broader framework because the notion of heritage takes into account both the past and the present, and both the tangible and intangible nature of the collection. The heritage lens offers a multifaceted perspective on the sale. Yet, as Smith (2006) argues dominant heritage discourse is known to naturalise issues of culture, identity and citizenship. The Netherlands has not given much attention to the consequences of the proposed sale for these issues in Africa, as I will describe later on.

The cultural performativity in the ethnological museum is inherent to the performativity of the museum itself. As Garuba (2007: 133) argues both the objects and the site function as representations of themselves and their previous lives. In could thus be argued that the ethnological museum is continuously engaged in the act of representation within the museum. Every display and exhibition on Africa can be understood as a way of representing Africa in a particular manner in the museum. This includes the representation of the heritage of the ethnology museum itself.

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Narratives of the past are imbedded in the museum site, the collection and the mode of displaying the collection.

These narratives that form part of the museum's heritage did not suddenly 'come into existence'. The same can be argued for the collection, it did not suddenly become 'cultural heritage'. The ethnology museums have gradually started to see their role as museum and the collections through a heritage lens. At the same time, the functioning of heritage as a discourse and as a cultural process has heavily informed this so-called shift from ethnology to heritage. Smith (2006) argues that heritage should be seen as a social construction. The idea of heritage, according to Smith (2006: 3) is seen a medium to construct and reconstruct different identities. Smith (2006) provides a very useful understanding of the idea of heritage:

> Heritage is a multilayered performance – be this a performance of visiting, managing, interpretation or conservation – that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while negotiating and constructing a sense of place, belonging and understanding in the present.
>
> (Smith 2006: 3)

This understanding of the idea of heritage relates both to heritage as a discourse and heritage as a cultural process. Smith (2006) argues that the museum can become a cultural tool to facilitate the cultural process of heritage. Heritage can function as a way to achieve cultural change through negotiating the meanings of identities in the past and in the present (Smith, 2006: 4). Through this process new identities can be expressed or new ways of being can be explored (Smith, 2006: 4). The objects of the Africa collection all have an individual meaning relating to different cultural identities, which are intertwined with the notion of intangible heritage. It appeared that ethnology museums were engaging in a process of cultural change.

4.3.1. Heritage Discourse in the Netherlands

The ethnology museums in the Netherlands adhere to the governed type of heritage. Heritage discourse, in this regard, determines the value of the objects and how heritage works through in the museum. It also determines which legal treaties and conventions are applicable to the collection and the museum. Heritage discourse also influences museum policies and acquisition policies. As discussed previously,

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alongside of the functioning of the dominant heritage discourse is the process of cultural heritage. As Smith (2006) explains this process of cultural heritage can also be seen in other discourses that may or may not function as a challenge to the dominant discourse of heritage. In the Netherlands, ethnological museums have adhered to the dominant discourse of heritage but at the same time deployed other discourses. For instance, the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden has initiated a project were artists made work especially to address the contested role of the ethnology museum. The results of this project can be seen in the garden of the museum. This project and debates around this project can be understood in terms of the process of cultural heritage. The project engaged with the problematic intangible heritage of the ethnology museum.

The difference between the dominant discourse of heritage and heritage as a cultural process is vital to the analysis of the proposed sale of the Africa collection. If one would analyse the sale through the dominant discourse of heritage, the archive for the analysis would be different. Through that lens, the archive would merely consist of museum policies, regulations and international treaties that deal with such a sale. These policies do take into account the sensitive origins of the collection but only to a certain extent. The Wereld Museum does not have an obligation to consider the history of the collection.

It can be argued that the proposed sale has a broader meaning that cannot be found through the dominant discourse of heritage. In order to think about the Africa collection as more than just ethnographic objects, one has to think differently about heritage. Labeling the collection as cultural heritage is not enough if it means that only the tangible value is taken into account. Seeing heritage as a culture process is less limiting and allows for an alternative understandings of the proposed sale of the collection. These alternative understandings take into consideration the contested history of the collection as well as its role in promoting cultural diversity in the museum.

The proposed sale of the Africa collection is a representation of ‘Africa’ in itself. It seems to represent the notion that ‘Africa’ and African collection is something that can be sold without taking into account the deeper meaning of the collection.

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It can be argued that through this representation another imaginary is created of Africa. The African collection is seen and treated as a commodity without the historical context. Unfortunately, in doing so the museum has reinforced ideas about the representation of Africa in the museum space. As set out earlier, the collection has been used a medium to encourage cultural diversity. However, if museums regulate the collections in terms of cultural heritage they also have an obligation to protect this cultural heritage. The other Dutch ethnological museums are more than willing to protect the collection on the basis of its value to Dutch cultural heritage. The collection is not protected on the basis that ethnological museums have a historical responsibility for collections that were acquired during dubious circumstances. Although the Netherlands might not have had formal colonies in Africa, their presence and role during slavery and colonialism had a great impact. Unfortunately, this history is not very known or public in the Netherlands. Therefore, museums thus function as a primary site to share this history with the public.

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed the proposed sale of the Africa collections in two ways. First, I identified the two prominent reasons that make the sale problematic, namely the intangible nature of the sale and the politics of representing Africa at the ethnological museum. Against this background I discussed how the sale could be analysed through heritage. There are two ways heritage can be used for this purpose. The dominant discourse of heritage is limiting because it merely looks at the rules and regulations around the sale. Seeing heritage in a broader framework, one which also exists outside of rules and regulations, offers an alternative interpretation of the sale. This entails seeing heritage as a cultural process that is related to both the tangible and the intangible nature of the objects. Analysing the sale through this lens gives further insight into problems that arise with this possible sale. The Wereld Museum Rotterdam did not take into consideration the contested nature of the sale nor did it take into consideration how Africa is represented to this sale.

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Conclusion

In this dissertation I analysed the meaning of the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum in Rotterdam. In order to so, I set out the background to the study. This background explained the context of the sale and set out some of the theoretical concepts this dissertation draws on. Concepts such as the idea of 'Africa', colonial ethnography and the representation of 'Otherness' are vital to the background of the sale. The Africa collections are strongly influenced by ideas about Africa and the 'Other'. This can be seen in the way Africa has been represented in the museum space.

Chapter Two discusses the politics of representation because they are closely related to the functioning of the discourse of colonial ethnography and heritage. In order to better understand how the politics of representation of Africa work in the museum space, I have set out the history of collecting and exhibiting African art at the ethnological museum. There have been shifts in the approach of representing African art over the years. I have argued that museums have moved away from exhibiting collections in a traditional ethnographic manner. Especially temporary exhibitions are a way for museums to demonstrate that they have shifted away from purely ethnographic displays. The ethnological museum became more conscious in its attitude towards exhibiting the 'Other'.

The shifts in representation described in this mini-dissertation are closely related to heritage discourse. Chapter Three has explored the understanding and functioning of heritage with regard to the Africa collections. Ethnological museums have started to define their existence, their collections and their function in society through heritage. Due to an increasing multiculturalism in society and the commodification of culture within a globalizing world order, the museum felt it had to adapt to these changes. The Africa collections gained more meaning and value through their positioning in the museum and their status as cultural heritage. This process is what I have referred to as the more governed 'type' of heritage. I have argued that this 'type' of heritage does not sufficiently take into account the intangible nature of heritage. The contested legacies of the collections are related to ideas about culture, identity and citizenship.

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Seeing heritage as a cultural process that exists alongside of heritage discourse provides for a better understanding of the complexity of the proposed sale of the Africa collection at the Wereld Museum.

In Chapter Four, I have further problematised the sale to give insight in the importance of intangible heritage. Narratives around the objects and around the way the collection came into existence are part of this intangible heritage. African museums are, therefore, strongly opposed to the sale of cultural and sacred objects that were acquired in an illegitimate manner in the first place. Rules and regulations that govern the legality of the sale are actually in place to protect cultural heritage for the Netherlands. However, heritage is constantly evolving and next to the dominant discourse of heritage exist other discourses and processes that allow for alternative interpretations of the proposed sale exist.

In conclusion, I wish to argue that the proposed sale analysed through heritage discourse in the Netherlands provides for a limited understanding of the meaning of the sale. The Africa collection is not only part of Dutch cultural heritage but is also part of African cultural heritage. This dual nature of the collection together with its contested history cannot fully be taken into consideration by heritage discourse because of its narrow understanding of intangible heritage. Heritage discourse is constantly evolving but at the moment the current practice and the rules and regulations in the Netherlands do not leave much room for an alternative understanding of the proposed sale.

I wish to suggest that this alternative meaning is equally important because it relates to issues of culture, identity and citizenship in the Netherlands *and* in Africa. As the museums have demonstrated they have a central role within society and actively engage in issues of multiculturalism. The historical responsibility of the museums is intertwined with this role. Opting for the sale of the Africa collection without consulting the African art institutions or starting a dialogue with various stakeholders seems dismissive of the intangible nature of the collection. Therefore, I argue that the only way in the Netherlands for ethnological museums to adapt to a multicultural society and promote cultural diversity is through being equitable. Through the

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proposed sale of the collection the museum has reified the process of 'Othering' and reinforced the idea of 'Africa' that it initially tried to deconstruct.

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